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The art magazine from Gallery Delta



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September 1994

R P & P Photographic Dept



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Cover: Robert Paul, *Quarry*, 1956, 91 x 76 cm, oil on canvas. Left above: Robert Paul. Below: Tapfuma Gutsa, *San King*, 2.65m, mixed metals.

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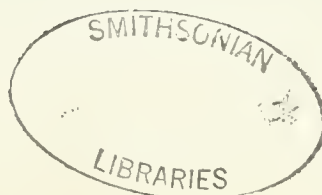
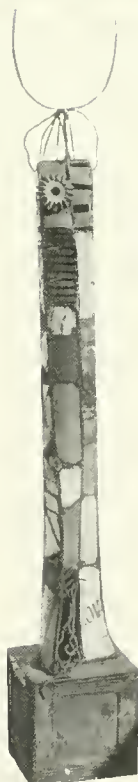
Publisher: Derek Huggins. Editor: Barbara Murray. Design Team: Barbara Murray, Myrtle Mallis & Robert Thompson. Typesetting: Visa Graphics. Origination & printing: A.W. Bardwell & Co. Colour: Colorscan (Pvt) Ltd.

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Subscriptions from Gallery Publications, P.O. Box UA 373, Union Avenue, Harare. Tel: (14) 792135.

Alan Allen



Artnotes

Welcome to the first issue of *Gallery*. This new magazine hopes to fill a gap which we feel in the visual arts community of Zimbabwe. There have been many endeavours over the years to produce local arts publications, *Arts Rhodesia* (1978), *Arts Zimbabwe* (1982), *ZED magazine* (1980s), *The Artist* (1990s) and *Southern African Art* (1990s) to name a few. But all have gone out of print on account of finance allied with lack of readership or lack of continuity. So why create another? Despite the problems, the fact remains that the arts in Zimbabwe, in Africa, need publications to record, review, criticise and publicise the activities and work of creative individuals.

As artists, art lovers, art patrons we are all aware of the complexity and ambiguity of images as well as the diverse responses of viewers. We feel the pleasure, stimulation and excitement of “seeing something”. We want to understand what the artist is trying to express, how our society impinges on creativity, the effects of art on our individual and collective consciousness. Experiences and thoughts have less impact in isolation. We need to communicate with one another and to promote the view that art criticism is “not an exercise of judgement but rather an act of empathy.”

Gallery aims to:

- document Zimbabwe’s art history in the making
- stimulate a wider interest in art
- promote discussion and awareness of work being produced by Zimbabwe’s talented young artists
- provoke debate and encourage exchange of opinion by placing art in its social context
- capture the larger cultural resonance so that people who don’t spend their lives within the art community can participate and benefit through greater understanding and appreciation
- write with enough passion so that people will want to go and see for themselves
- give insight into how artists think and work, their ideas and techniques
- link Zimbabwe’s visual culture with that of other cultures both regional and international.

The emphasis of *Gallery* will be on painting, graphics and sculpture plus

some coverage of architecture, design, jazz, little theatre and poetry. We will include reviews of events and exhibitions, news from the local and regional art scene, interviews with local and visiting artists, in-depth analysis of both recent and past work, critical appreciation and discussion of a range of topics of interest to artists, art patrons and the wider public.

We also intend to open up Zimbabwean perceptions of the changing international art scene and to seek its relevance to us. We have numerous artists visiting Zimbabwe including recently two sculptors, one from India and one from Barbados. Both gave good slide-talks about their work but at the time there was no way of reaching the wider public. *Gallery* will in future issues review such events. Regional topics will be covered by writers such as Marion Arnold whom we all remember as one of Zimbabwe’s best art critics, and Tessa Colvin also well-known locally. From the UK, we will publish articles by Margaret Garlake and Keith Murray who are familiar with both the local and the British art scenes. Writers from other African countries as well as from Australia and Canada will also contribute. We hope to spread the network as widely as possible.

This first issue has a narrow focus as a special celebration of the centenary of Robert Paul’s old house, recording its rebirth as an energetic art centre and featuring Paul’s life and work. Forthcoming issues will be broader in scope including such articles as Berry Bickle’s views on art, an in-depth assessment of the annual ‘Heritage’ exhibition and its supposed role in setting standards, Steve Williams with art news from Bulawayo, critical appraisal of paintings by Luis Meque and Thomas Mukarobgwa (both of whom are about to be launched onto the European market while their work goes largely unrecorded locally), controversial opinions about our status quo from recently graduated students, and views on cultural identity from Trevor Gould, a conceptual artist and white African now living in Canada.

At present the art scene is in a state of flux with a new director at the National Gallery. We have another political appointment and, while we may query the suitability of a professor of

linguistics for the post, it is a *fait accompli*. If, however, Professor Kahari can use his political and diplomatic skills to improve the National Gallery’s standing in government eyes, persuade them to increase the pathetic budget (particularly infuriating when we are constantly subjected to empty rhetoric about the government’s belief in the importance of culture!) and bring a larger public into the art gallery, his appointment may be advantageous. We shall have to wait and see. Professor Kahari has the services of an active and committed Board member in Pip Curling. If he uses her knowledge, energy and skill there may be the makings of a good start.

Beginnings are also taking place at the Goethe Institute and the Alliance Française which both have new cultural directors. Their impact on the local art scene can be considerable. The Goethe Institute is already playing an active role with its promotion of the recent Adda Geiling exhibition and the commission of three artists to produce work for permanent display within its offices.

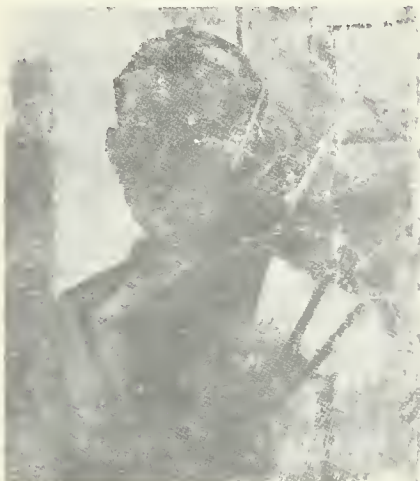
Gallery is another beginning. Art publications are by their nature expensive to produce and limited in circulation. We are seeking sponsorship to sustain the publication and improve its content, quality and circulation in the succeeding issues to which we are already committed. In essence we are another bunch of optimists hoping to meet the need that exists. It feels like the right time. Response has been encouragingly positive with more than one hundred of you subscribing in faith — thank you! And also, to all those who helped in so many different ways in getting *Gallery* together and into print, many thanks. We look forward to your comments on this first issue and your contributions to following issues are actively sought so that we can give voice to the wide range of opinion on the visual arts. Please contact me via Gallery Delta or send letters and articles for consideration. *Gallery* is your magazine. Together we can make it stimulating and successful.

The Editor ☐

Spatters of oil paint,
piles of abandoned
sketches and paintings,
Colette Wiles remembers
life with her father

Robert Paul at 110 Livingstone Avenue

Ilo Battigelli



Among my strongest memories of life at 110 is the memory of Robert painting in the early morning light near the corner of the verandah next to his bedroom and studio at the west end of the house. There he would be in his paint-spattered dressing gown, brush in hand, bent slightly over the rickety old deal table which leant against the wall, a study in concentration as he took a step back to view the results, his distinguished greying head tilted slightly in critical appraisal. The morning sun threw good light on his work, and on the dust and rubbish that accumulated everywhere - the spatters of oil paint on the table, empty turps bottles, abandoned canvases, egg shells (broken in making the egg tempera he used), cigarette stubs, the browning edges of abandoned water colours, many of them half finished, some barely begun, forming a pile beneath the one he was working on. Robert's old wooden easel used to be propped against one of the brick pillars and at one time was the favoured perch of a Lizard Buzzard. Returning home with a friend one night, Robert noticed an injured bird in the road, picked it up and brought it back to 110 where it lived

freely and uncaged in that part of the verandah. It would perch on the easel, expressing its displeasure, until it recovered from its wounds and flew away.

Robert's mood when painting was positive, forward-looking, challenged, a great contrast to the intervening despondency when he would not touch a drawing or painting for weeks, declaring that he could not stand painting anyway; that for him it was a compulsion. It was a compulsion that was with him from childhood - he was aware of light, colour and texture from his earliest days. Two superbly executed pictures, both snow scenes, sophisticated and atmospheric, survive, painted when he was a boy of about ten.

After breakfast at the circular oak table which was the focus of family life and which was set in front of the fireplace between the front door and the kitchen door, Robert would sit in his comfortable brown armchair opposite the propped-up painting. He would study the work with a benign, almost content expression for a long time, then pick it up, take it back to



Above: Robert Paul, Self Portrait,
oil on canvas.
Right: Snow scene painted
when Robert Paul
was about
10 years of age.



Top: Part of the front verandah that was Robert Paul's studio. Above: Robert Paul asleep in the garden of 110.

the table on the verandah and continue working on it for three or more hours, still clad in his dressing gown. Sometimes at a loss as to how to proceed, he would ask Dreen for her opinion - "...perhaps a bit of cloud there to fill the space". He would alter it as suggested and then invariably say "Now you've made me stuff it up!"

At 10.30 a.m. Robert would swear that he could hear the pub doors opening, stop working, get dressed and drive up to one of the clubs to meet friends in the bar where he would stay till lunchtime. Sometimes when work was progressing well he didn't go to the pub but went back to his chair, seated with his arms on the wooden armrests, a gin and tonic in his right hand, scarcely taking his eyes away from the painting balanced against the sofa in front of him.

When his painting moods were with him, the house was more or less taken over: the air was redolent with the foul smell of size being boiled up over a little hot-plate in the kitchen, the bathroom would have oil paint everywhere, brushes being cleaned in the bath, and often the bath itself filled with paintings undergoing the water treatment (removal of the unwanted areas of a painting by the process of gum-resist). Another smell which pervaded the house was linseed oil, added with turps as part of the medium to the oil paint. The raw linseed oil had to be purified and Robert used to do this by pouring the oil onto a saucer and placing it somewhat precariously atop the corrugated iron sheets forming the kitchen roof (now the back verandah) to bleach in the sun. He was very interested in not only the techniques but also the materials used in painting and read about these avidly. He kept a collection of art books in his 'studio'.

The room which was actually the 'studio' was a small enclosed area of the verandah, but it very quickly filled up with rolls of paper, paintings and artists' materials. As Robert painted, so he retreated out of the room itself and onto the verandah, and when that became full, his bedroom was next! There were paintings and drawings everywhere, piled against bedroom walls, under Robert's bed, even. His bedroom was seldom cleaned. He refused to put anything away, and Dreen refused to sweep and dust until he had done so, so month after month saw increasing levels of dust, with papers, odd sketches, paintings, bits of charcoal, correspondence, bar receipts, empty cigarette cartons and general detritus

occupying every surface. When I could stand it no longer, I would announce my intention of cleaning out my father's bedroom; he would complain bitterly at first, however, once into the spirit of it, Robert would join in the tidying session, throwing away with great gusto those sketches, drawings and paintings which he considered to be no good (most of them); piling them high into the dustbin situated in the sanitary lane at the back of the house. I can remember then visiting the dustbin with my mother, giggling together as we retrieved some of the paintings and sketches with comments of "you never know - Robert may one day become famous. Let's save these just in case." And the rescued work would be stashed away in the loft near the east bathroom - again gathering dust until some of them were dug out for the Retrospective Exhibition in 1976.

Robert's bedroom was probably the room of greatest character in the house. It is now a respectable office/gallery, but was remembered vividly by all who passed through it - the shambles of dust, unmade bed, paintings and generally dishevelled appearance - a complete contrast to Robert himself, who always looked immaculate even when he had slept in his suit, which he did regularly! When I had left home, married and was working in England my mother sent wonderfully descriptive and hilarious letters of events at 110. One letter described a particularly heavy session at the Sports Club the night before. Mum wrote "Robert woke up this morning not only with a strange woman in his bed, but a strange dog, too!"

Perhaps 110 was originally like so many other Avenue houses - strictly functional, rather dark and slightly depressing. However, it was unlike any of the other houses in that it was large and long, and the garden was generous in size. Until the late 1940s there were always tenants occupying various parts of the house and at one stage the big living room was halved by a thick enormous curtain to create more rooms for tenants. Dreen never had any domestic help. When we lived in the east wing, she would have to chop wood to feed the old boiler for hot water to do the washing in the old cast iron bath with claw feet now standing in the back courtyard of Gallery Delta. The old coal stove was used to heat heavy metal irons for all the ironing.

The family was able to spread out once we occupied the whole house (apart from the cottage), but Dreen's workload doubled; the house was impossible to

keep clean. Everything in it was second-or-third-hand. All the floor boards were warped, which meant that the carpets were cleaner, but barer, over the upward curving edges of the boards and since sweeping seemed to produce more rather than less dust, this was kept to a minimum! Dreen did all the washing up outside on a concrete surface which she built herself adjacent to a low garden wall made entirely of gin, brandy and vodka bottles! Observing this, a friend of the family once commented that the kitchen garden was pure Tennessee Williams! Dreen was adept at adhoc improvements, removing iron roof sheets to let more light into the living room and getting water to the kitchen by a hose pipe fed through the window from the bathroom boiler. Robert insisted on three cooked meals a day which she always provided. And then there were many hours spent working in the garden. One day Dreen and I decided to build a small pool, which is still there, to cool off after the heavy digging sessions. Yet she still had plenty of energy for tennis and was always ready to join in any parties.

The house itself was not an ideal one for entertaining and indeed it was never used for that in the accepted formal sense. People would just pop in and stay for hours. They sat around the circular oak dining table in the middle of the living room drinking and talking till it graduated into an impromptu, full-blooded party. At these sessions there would be much laughter and witty conversation, although later it might degenerate to more argumentative levels. If the visitors were fellow artists, the talk would often be about art - Dad would talk eloquently for hours about techniques, materials and so on, and indeed, I think it was the only subject he ever accorded serious lengthy discussion.

In those days there was very little art consciousness; anyone who was an artist was by definition somewhat odd, a misfit given to Left Bank excesses, a Bohemian. However Robert didn't fit any of these categories, and his painting was simply accepted as part of life at 110. As small children, my brother and I attended David Livingstone School, just over the road. Perhaps because we realised that our household was rather unorthodox, not on account of Robert's artistry, but because of the individualism and occasional wild revelry of our parents, we did not invite friends home very often. One deeply embarrassing episode was when a schoolfriend wanted to come home with me at lunchtime. As we walked across the

road from school, I was already a little apprehensive about the visit. If my father had had a few drinks he was quite likely to say something embarrassing. We timidly entered the living room and approached Robert who was in his armchair, slumped drunkenly and reading the telephone directory upside-down! Fortunately, he was too drunk to say anything disparaging... but I shall never forget my friend's utter wide-eyed amazement at this odd apparition. She came from a very upright household, and had probably never seen anyone drunk in her entire life.

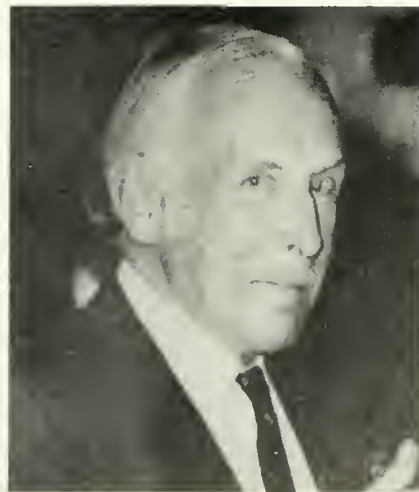
Over the years the garden at 110 became more and more overgrown. Robert's only interest in the garden was painting it. A friend recalls: "Robert once went with his brother on a painting tour in England. They would stop, then go on a bit further, and then over the hill which looked more interesting, and then a bit further still, until they had covered four counties in this way without painting anything. And then Robert got back to Africa and found everything he ever wanted in his own back garden!"

Holidays were a great treat. Early holidays were spent in Beira. In those days we went by train and Rhodesia Railways moved mighty slowly! When it reached Macheke, the train stopped and everyone got out, including the driver, and headed straight into the nearby hotel pub. Travelling by train was a hot, thirsty business. Robert was very interested in the Portuguese architecture in Beira and sketched the houses with their balustraded gardens along the roads. He loved Nyanga and spent many holidays there with the family, and also with Paul just fishing and painting. The kaleidoscopic colours of Nyanga fascinated him and he particularly loved the deep rust colours of some of the dirt roads there. Because he was away from the stresses of work, his moods on holiday were generally tranquil, and he was able to paint and sketch to his heart's content. But he was unpredictable. Sometimes on returning home to 110, he would be depressed and moody and not paint again for days.

110 Livingstone Avenue was a house of great character, given it by the colourful personalities living there. What would Robert say if he could see it today? Something dry, witty, off-hand, coarse maybe. "It was Dreen'sing house anyway." But deep inside would be a swelling pride in and gratitude for the acknowledged tribute to him and his life's work. □



**Above: Dreen
fixing the chimney
at 110 Livingstone Avenue.
Below: Robert Paul
at a party (1977?).**





Robert Paul, *The Montclair*, 1979

**Colln Style looks at the
interconnections in the life,
character and work of the
artist Robert Paul (1906 - 1980)**

An Englishman Abroad

My first acquaintance with, arguably, Southern Africa's greatest artist was when I was about ten years old. My family's old home in then Rhodesia stood, and still stands, on the crown of a hill overlooking Harare in the distance with an orchard, fields and the Mukuvisi River in between. Robert Paul was standing on the lip of the hill in front of the house executing a water colour of the view. Three or four of us children wandered up and stood around breathing chewing gum on and staring at his efforts. He was not at all put out. In fact, he was rather pleased and chatted to us unselfconsciously as he painted. I remember him remarking that he was painting the sky brown to reflect the fields - it seemed a rather strange and wonderful comment and I must confess that we tapped our foreheads derisively.

Robert Fowler Paul was born on 12 March 1906 in Sutton, Surrey. He began painting at the age of eight, winning a Daily Express competition for young artists. Only towards the end of his life did more honours come his way. He went to school at Monkton Combe near Bath and on leaving took up a series of dreary clerical jobs in London. Mercifully for his sanity, he did not stick them for long and, in 1927, he joined the British South Africa Police as a rookie trooper and went out to then Rhodesia.

His talents were recognised in the Police. He was employed as a cartographer to sketch from horseback and he spent some years roaming and charting the Save Valley and other remote corners of the country. Few artists can have been so saturated with landscape

in learning their trade. Later, he joined the pay corps in the army, retiring in 1951 as a pensionable 'twenty year man'. He then painted more or less happily until the end of his life. He died in 1980, at the age of seventy four.

Although he was a most dedicated artist, he did have a nihilistic tendency to lose interest when a canvas was completed. Frequently pictures would be dumped in the wind and the rain or left in the outside shed to the attentions of the white ants. Fortunately, his wife Dreen and daughter Colette early on took an interest in their safe-keeping and tucked pictures away in a dry, insect-free spot in the eaves.

He had a long range correspondence and friendship dating from the 1920s, with John Piper who was a major influence and introduced him to modern art and the technique of gum resist which became a significant part of his painting method.

Robert Paul was almost purely a landscape painter. Not only in subject but by evacuating all animal and human life from his scenes. This absence serves both aesthetic effect and meaning and message. Nothing must detract from the arrangement of pure masses. The absence is to obtain intensity of focus and concentration and a mood of pure gravitas without any lapse into unbecoming detail. There is no compromise with the total artistic achievement of arranging the absolute essence of what he sees and wants to see. For all the sarcastic humour and work full of celebrations of colour, he is not a sunny artist. It was remarked of him 'the visions roll out of him'. This was allied to a subjective feeling that the visions have never quite communicated. For all their colour and beauty, his landscapes can reflect a feeling of barren alienation. In a picture like *Nyanga 1966* it is not a question so much of 'light breaking where no sun shines' but of not lighting up where it should. The laws of nature have ceased to operate. Although the skies are full of light the mass of the landscape remains dark. Ambiguously, the artist suggests both the infusion of light from genesis starting to spread through creation, and the afterglow with light withdrawing the vital spark. In another landscape, also prosaically called *Nyanga 1950*, the composition is of opposing blocks of colour. They all meet at the foothills at one neutral point where all energy is nullified. He also varied speed of execution to express his vision. Sometimes cold and monolithic, sometimes like vibrant masses of lava, he experimented again and again with the same landscapes.

He was possessed of a remarkable artistic memory sharpened by the years of exact cartographical work. He told one of his mentors, Professor Brian Bradshaw, of a scene he remembered, from fifty years before, of an English landscape. Paul described it in minute detail, down to the dew on the grass.

His type of style and vision was moulded by the Nyanga mountains in the eastern highlands of the country. He was a unique interpreter of the sparsely populated landscape with its magnificent views of rock masses, mountains and waterfalls. The austere scenery with its combination of bright sunlight, yet high rainfall and frequent mists, was artistically rewarding yet exacting. It suited him well. Other more commercial landscape artists in the country exploited what has been called the 'msasa and piccanin' vein of Zimbabwean art. Bright, soft and sentimental pictures that prominently feature the msasa tree which produces a riot of seasonal red and autumnal coloured leaves. Robert Paul however, would have none of it.

As his health began to fail in the late seventies, and the escalating war in Zimbabwe cut him off more and more from Nyanga, his work, paradoxically, began to both diminish and to grow. Canvases

were left unfinished and unsigned. He was abdicating even as he painted on. The reversion to an earlier style expressed itself in jagged strokework exploding from the ground like 'dragons' teeth. It was completely different from the study and modelling of broad masses of rocks, hills, and savannah as expressions of creation maturing or decaying. Yet, the eye and vision is manifestly the same. It is a tour de force of communication to alter style and remain so distinctly himself. He was always his own man.

A further, more subtle difference expressed in a work like *The Montclair*, dated 1979, puts jagged, churning brush-strokes upfront in the immediate foreground. Hitherto he always tended to maintain an objective focus by keeping the foreground neutral and devoid of artistic excitement. Prone to hypochondria and a dread of death all his life, he was coming to terms with finality in his own way. Actually, *The Montclair*, which is a hotel in Nyanga, had been attacked by guerrillas that year, who burst into the dining-room and shot down guests. Although the picture is called by the name of a hotel, no hotel buildings are visible in the erupting landscape. It is painted in a furious, shorthand idiom.

Paul took away buildings as well as human and animal life from his landscapes. However, he developed urban houses and buildings as a separate subject with great success. His studies of these are also emptied of features that could reduce concentration - no folksy touches of children playing on corners. Again there is this uncompromising gravitas. Reticence and economy are important methods of artistic message. What is left out can be as important as what is put in.

Many, if not most, of his house and building studies are of the colonial style of the turn of the century. A number of the buildings have since been demolished. They often carry an air of listlessness. Paul's houses appear empty not only at the moment of record, but convey the curious impression, even as they are solidly constructed, of having been abandoned for decades. Within the pleasing, naturalistic presentation of a building, he switches blocks of light and shade and selects minimal lines to capture the essential emotive and aesthetic aspects of colonial rococo.

Although Robert Paul passed his life in a remote, unimportant country, largely unregarded as an artist as he painted picture after picture of Nyanga landscapes, he did have his mentors. Frank McEwen was appointed director of the then Rhodesia National Gallery in the 1960s. At a cocktail party, McEwen remarked to an uncle of mine, an old friend of the artist, that Robert Paul was one of the finest artists in Africa. Many years later the Gallery appointed Professor Brian Bradshaw as Director. He held essentially the same opinion as Frank McEwen. In 1976, under his impetus, the National Gallery arranged an exhibition of two hundred of Robert Paul's works - his wife and daughter's loving care was starting to pay off. Then, in 1980, the year he died, the National Gallery of South Africa gave him an exhibition at their gallery in Pretoria. It was the first time a Zimbabwean artist was so honoured.

However, the ball has really only started to roll in the thirteen years since his death. A few years before he died, you could pick up a decent Robert Paul for a couple of hundred dollars. In 1991, paintings from the exhibition to commemorate Robert Paul on the opening of new Gallery Delta at his old house, were changing hands at Z\$10,000 and this was considered conservative pricing. It is evident that distinction is allied to popular appeal. The stage could be set for this important artist to achieve international recognition. It would be a return from exile of an Englishman abroad. □

Those who know the vastness of the African landscape understand that it is indefinable in human terms. Man is puny by comparison with this land. It is better for him not to intrude.

By excluding the figure, which would act as a measure of scale, Paul is never forced to define those forms which are monumental and those which are diminutive.

For Paul even the smallest rock or sprig of grass had its own grandeur.



Stoffer Geiling

Robert Paul, *Rocks at Inyanga (II)*, 1969, 86 x 53 cm, oil / tempera on canvas

Space and Place

Structure and romanticism in
the paintings of Robert Paul
discussed by Pip Curling



Stoffer Getting

Robert Paul, The Pool, 1976, 77 x 64 cm, oil on canvas

Robert Paul came to Africa in 1927 from an England which was, for him, narrow, populous and restrictive. Although he had no formal training there as a painter, he brought with him, as did many early colonisers,¹ the English tradition of reverence for the landscape as a subject for painting. Paul left Britain at a time when the people of that country were experiencing a reaction against the city and a desire to get back to nature in its untamed state. Even the suburbs, which were designed and built to get people out of the city, were themselves eroding the countryside. [Spalding 1986: 70] Robert Paul took a bolder step than the suburban dweller who bought a country cottage as a weekend retreat, he left for Africa.

Paul's interpretation of the African landscape suggests a dislocation between his love of its space and grandeur and an inner feeling of alienation in a hostile environment.² Many of his mature landscape paintings in Zimbabwe were of the underpopulated areas of the Nyanga mountains or the bleak, baobab-inhabited planes of the lowveld. His deliberate avoidance of the human element in these paintings could, on one level, be that of the archetypal European coloniser who ignores the existence of the indigenous people but could equally be expressive of the soul of an Englishman coming into contact with the spiritual munificence of a land unsullied by industrial excrement and waste. The former theory might be more politically fashionable in the present day but the latter is more likely to be the truth.³

A close examination of the paintings of Robert Paul dispels the popularly held belief that he was an intuitive artist, driven to make art at the whim of his muse.⁴ There is every evidence, in his work, that Paul was an intellectual painter who, although he responded emotively to the landscape, finely tuned his response with formal pictorial structures.

Robert Paul understood the laws of two-dimensional composition and he used them. His familiarity with the norms, conventions and inventions of twentieth century painting probably came through his conversations and correspondence with John Piper and Ivon Hitchens and from his own reading and study of art works.⁵ Hitchens, whose painting seems closer to Paul than that of Piper with whom Paul had the longer acquaintance, was a member of the Seven and Five Society. This group published a manifesto when it held its first exhibition in which they stated, "The object ... is merely to express what (the artists) feel in terms that shall be intelligible, and not to demonstrate a theory nor attack a tradition." [Spalding 1986: 63] Norbet Lynton says of Hitchens' landscape paintings, "Between the scene and the painting lie several steps of transformation" [1993: 54] This is also true of Paul who constructed his work by underpainting, layering, scumbling and glazing; working in his studio, to distil the essence of the landscape from sketches he had made on site.⁶ In the years following his visit to England in 1948, Paul made a series of



Stoffer Geiling

Robert Paul, *Summit of Inyangani*, 1967, 122 x 91 cm, oil / tempera on hardboard

abstract-figurative compositions based on the landscape, buildings and street scenes (*Landscape* 1958). He said in an interview with Colin Black for *Illustrated Life Rhodesia*, “I had my abstract period without success.” [Black: 31] His dismissal of what he calls his ‘abstract period’ should not be interpreted as a rejection of structured picture making per se but is probably an indication that the distanced formalism of the genre was, for him, insufficient. From the late 1950s he pursued a more figurative rendering of the landscape but the pictorial disciplines learned during his ‘abstract period’ remained. He must have been aware, even before he attempted abstraction, that Piper had already abandoned it. Piper’s own experience of the usefulness of the formalism of abstraction may have persuaded Paul to follow that path.

“By 1938 the looming war made the clear but closed world of abstract art untenable for me... The abstract practice taught me a lot that I would not have learned without it...”
[Ingrams & Piper 1983: 22]

Piper spent the summer of 1946 in Snowdonia, Wales. He returned to North Wales the following year. For Piper the Welsh mountains

were intensely dramatic and sensational:

“Each rock had a positive personality: for the first time I saw the bones and the structure... of the mountains.” [Ingrams & Piper: 1983 105]

In 1948 Paul spent several months in the company of John Piper. Piper’s previous involvement in abstraction and his enthusiasm for his recent discovery of the bleak and uninhabited landscape of Wales was surely the impetus which drove Paul to the path he was to follow after his return from Britain.

Summit of Inyangani 1967,⁷ (also known as *Inyangani*) is a good example of the period when Paul had found his subject, the rugged landscape, and was most comfortable with his mixed media technique of gum and oil resist.⁸ The composition of this painting, as with many of Paul’s works, is tightly organised according to the ‘golden section’. An implied vertical left of centre begins on the peak of the background mountain, cuts through a gap in the ochre foliage below it, continues through the centre of the dark amorphous mass (which is the focal point of the composition) and ends at the protuberance of the pale foreground rock. This vertical

'Robert Paul's Old House' 110 Livingstone Avenue / Ninth Street,
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(P. O. Box UA 373, Union Avenue) Tel: 792135



The Centenary Celebration of 110 Livingstone Avenue



Robert Paul 110 Livingstone Avenue 1978

with an exhibition of
Paintings, Drawings and
Graphics by

Robert Paul & John Piper

and the launch of 'Gallery' the new arts
magazine

on Tuesday the 20th of September, 1994 at
5.30 p.m.

gallery delta

Robert Paul



Paul and Piper: together, even the names have harmony and it is interesting to draw a parallel of the lives of these two English painters.

They were both born in Surrey in England — Robert Fowler Paul three years after John Piper, in 1906. Both were involved in art at an early age. In Paul's case, his love of painting and his talent was evident when he was 10 years, when the Royal Academician, W.O. Wiley, expressed interest in his work and advised his parents to ensure that he never took lessons. It seemed that both their fathers were strict Victorians; Robert could never do anything to please his, while Piper's father would not let him study art. In later years there was

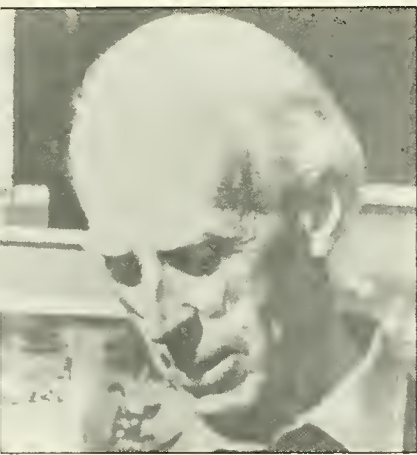
a remarkable resemblance: both were tall, trim and erect, and both had long, aristocratic features, Piper rather more gaunt than Paul. Each married twice. Both were to draw and paint buildings and landscape. Both were to gain recognition as artists in different arenas — Piper in Britain and Paul in Africa — and finally, they were friends who maintained contact over a period of fifty years.

In the 1920's Paul's painting and drawing was of a conventional kind — he described his work at that time as of an academic nature, and he did not become aware of the contemporaries until he met Ivon Hitchens and John Piper who introduced him to the works of Picasso and Georges Braque, and this he claimed had some influence on his own work. Paul met Piper through a mutual friend, Miles Marshall, who attended the same public school as Paul: Monkton Combe, near Bath in Somerset. Marshall had met Piper in the General Strike in May, 1926, when Piper was driving an East Surrey omnibus of which he was the conductor!

In 1927, a year after Piper entered the Richmond School of Art, Paul emigrated to Southern Rhodesia, having enlisted in the British South Africa Police as a trooper; here the lives of the two men diverged sharply. Rhodesia in those days was cut off from Europe in terms of artistic trends and it seems that Paul's main contact with what was happening in the art world was with his friend, Marshall.

In the early 1930's Marshall started to write to Paul about painting. After Paul's death, Marshall said: "We used to cover many sheets of the thinnest available Air mail paper in small writing about form, colour, composition and aesthetics. What on earth we found to say that covered so much good clean paper, I am at loss to explain! I think Piper and Robert probably first met in the early 1930's when he was in England on

John Piper



John Egerton Christmas Piper was one of the most distinguished British artists of his generation. In a tribute to Piper, Martin Gayford described him as being in some ways among the most English of 20th century painters. "Indeed", he wrote, "he shares with one or two contemporaries — Paul Nash, Graham Sutherland, Eric Ravilious — the distinction of having revealed to the rest of us new aspects of our familiar surroundings."

John Piper was born in Epsom in 1903 and as a schoolboy at Epsom College he was interested in topographic drawing which is so marked in his later work. He used to accompany his father on rural expeditions from an early age and at the age of 10 he was tracing stained-glass windows in parish churches. But his father, a solicitor, refused to let him study art and it was not until 1926 that he entered the Richmond School of Art and later the Royal College of Art.

In 1953 he was invited to join the Seven and Five, a group of painters and sculptors which included the elite of the English Modern Movement: Ben Nicholson, Henry Moore, Barbara Hepworth and Ivon Hitchens. In the mid Thirties Piper was one of the "most determinedly radical and abstract painters in Britain; indeed, after Ben Nicholson he ranks as the most distinguished abstract painters of the period." But he felt that abstraction was not for him. "Such things", he wrote to Paul Nash in 1943, "are disciplines which open a road to one's heart, but they are not the heart itself."

He separated from the group to pursue his own path and he returned before the war to landscape subjects, particularly on the South Coast and in Wales, but made them from collages of torn papers. By the early Forties his work had developed "an intense, elegiac romanticism which puts one in mind of Evelyn Waugh's *Brideshead Revisited*,

leave. John's recollection of his first meeting with Robert was not as a fellow artist, but as a beer-drinking pal of mine. He recalls a trip to Chanctonbury Ring on the Sussex Downs which the three of us made, but it was not a sketching party, just a walk to encourage our thirsts for Sussex ale."

At that time Piper's work was exploratory and immature and it was later that Paul's interest in his work increased. He was also much attracted to the French modernist Pierre Bonnard and to Patrick Heron, but feeling that he was out of touch with current talents in Britain, he tried to be himself. Professor Brian Bradshaw was to say towards the end of the 1970's when Director of the National Gallery of Rhodesia: "Robert Paul is his own man."

Paul did many sketches and drawings while he was with the services in Rhodesia but he did not have much time for painting, and was not then the prolific painter he became after his retirement in 1951. He then had thirty years to complete his work — of buildings, the Transkei Coast and the Inyanga Downs.

Paul shared Piper's enthusiasm for buildings and was fascinated by the old commercial and domestic buildings in Rhodesia and Mozambique. He lived and painted at 110 Livingstone Avenue, an early colonial house, for 43 years, where both his and a few of John Piper's paintings hung. At one time Paul was commissioned by Syfrets to produce a portfolio of paintings of the old buildings in the then Salisbury. Many of them have since been demolished.

A major development in art-awareness in Rhodesia came with the building of the National Gallery in Salisbury in the late 1950's. The first director, Frank McEwen, said of the 'Quarry', painted by Paul and donated to the gallery before it was opened: "This work gives me tremendous encouragement for the potential of art in Rhodesia." A local critic at the time complained that there was too little recognition for painters here and another stated that Paul "could hold his own in any international competition" and "all pictures show profound accomplishment in draughtsmanship, composition and tone values and are quiet outstanding." Today, the National Gallery has thirty and more Paul paintings in its Permanent Collection.

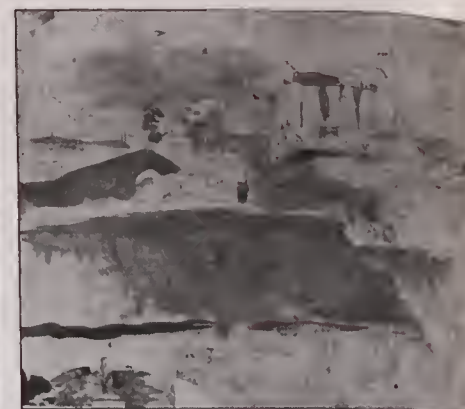
In 1965 Paul's work was exhibited at the Commonwealth Festival of Arts, London and in 1976 Paul's work was honoured by the National Gallery of Rhodesia in the first one-man retrospective exhibition ever to be held there. Paul was a shy, diffident man and when he viewed the extraordinary variety of his paintings assembled at the Gallery, he said "I was amazed when I saw them there. They looked so nice."

Robert Paul was an exceptionally generous man and gave away many of his canvases to his friends and colleagues. In 1980, the year of his death, a selection of his works were exhibited in South Africa, and since his death, his work has been represented in Germany, at Gallery Delta, Harare and in 1982 his paintings appeared at last with those of the painters he had admired from five thousand miles away: Piper, Ivon Hitchens and others at the British Council supported exhibition of Neo Romantic Art at the National Gallery, Harare. He would have been so proud. ■

Robert Paul



St. Swithins, Market Square 1971



Manica Road (*Working drawing*) (c. 1950's)



Haddon Hall (*Fragment*)



Prince Edward School Chapel 1954

John Piper



Back Garden, Malmsbury 21.3.57



Church (Silk Screen 1/95)



Church — “To Robert with best wishes”
1940's



Windsor Castle 1940's

written at this time. Storm clouds lower over the baroque piles of Seaton Delaval and Sir Osbert Sitwell's Renishaw Hall. So overcast were the skies above his watercolour of Windsor Castle as to lead George VI to make the hesitant comment on inspecting them: "You've been very unlucky with the weather, Mr. Piper." In 1940 Piper was appointed an official War Artist with the special brief of recording bomb damage.

Piper's work in the 1950's is less well-known in Britain, partly because he exhibited them in America, and some of the best painting are in American collections. Over the last thirty years or so he painted a profusion of vigorous landscapes in oil and gouache of Venice and of French Romanesque churches, but mostly of landscape and architecture throughout Britain.

Piper's distinguished friends and collaborators included the poet John Betjeman, Osbert Lancaster, Peter Pears and Benjamin Britten; John Piper designed most of Britten's operas and his wife Myfanwy wrote a number of his libretti. Ten years ago Piper's work was shown at the Tate Gallery in London, in celebration of his eightieth birthday and the exhibition presented an extraordinary illustration of Britain from the 1930's to 1984. Some of this work was sent to Harare and displayed at the National Gallery in an exhibition entitled "John Piper and English Neo Romanticism" along with works by other well-known British Artists and Zimbabwe's own Neo Romantic artist, Robert Paul.

John Piper is well known for many excellent and distinctive works produced during his very active life: the Shell Guides, on which he collaborated with John Betjeman; the book illustrations; the designs for ballet, theatre and opera; the prints, aquatints and paintings; the stained glass, notably in both Coventry and Liverpool Cathedrals; the designs for tapestry and vestments; the ceramics and photographs. But perhaps Piper will be most remembered for his famous re-interpretation of the English tradition of Constable and Turner: the romantic watercolour paintings of the British countryside, houses and churches.

He died in 1992 aged 89. Henry Thorold, in his obituary on Piper, wrote: "John was not only a most distinguished painter: he was also the most generous of friends and the most modest of men." ■

Acknowledgements to Anthony West and Martin Gayford.

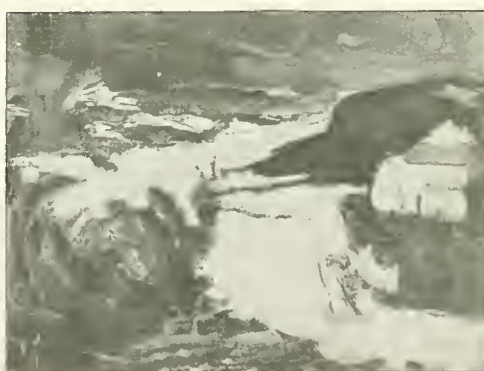
Robert Paul



Mount Inyangani



Inyanga



Transkei Coast (c. 1950's)



Inyanga (1978)

gallery delta



'Robert Paul's Old House' 110 Livingstone Avenue / Ninth Street,
Greenwood Park, Harare, Zimbabwe.
(P. O. Box UA 373, Union Avenue) Tel: 792135

divides the landscape format at the golden mean.⁹ Diagonals which lead the eye to the focal point are those of the large green hill shape on the right, the massed vegetation on the left, the rocks in the centre of the composition and the scratches of light coloured grass in the bottom left-hand corner.

Spatial illusion is rendered through the alternating horizontal bands of light and dark in the overlapping rocks and plants in the foreground. Deep space is effected, using the High Renaissance technique of 'sfumato' in the far distant hills.¹⁰ The middle ground is missing, apart from a small smudge of lighter colour immediately above the central rocks, at the foot of the large hill. More important than spatial illusion, is the spatial ambiguity evident in this painting. Deep space is suggested and then it is wilfully negated in order to assert both the flatness of the picture plane and a confrontation with the landscape. Flattening of illusionistic space and the acknowledgement of the reality of the picture plane is central to twentieth century modernism.¹¹ The raised horizon in *Summit of Inyangani* suggests an elevated eye level which the close-up view of the rocks contradicts. One is able to look across at the distant hills and down at the nearby rocks — a multiple viewpoint which, in keeping with modernist theories, denies the deep space of a single point perspective. The ambivalent viewpoint is also significant to the interpretation of the painting. The higher eye level which sweeps into the distance perceives an arcadian dream — access to which is denied by lowering the gaze to become aware of the forbidding rocks in the foreground. Thus the viewer, an intruder in the landscape, is barred from intimacy with its splendour.

In other landscape paintings, such as *Inyanga Valley* 1970, where Paul does not create a foreground barrier, the distant rocks and hills are themselves aggressively menacing. The elimination of bold foreground shapes in this painting is compensated by the emphasis on those of the background. There is little other than bare earth in the foreground but the strongly defined, heavily outlined background granite hills move forward onto the picture plane.

Colour in *Summit of Inyangani*, although not so in all of Paul's work, is literal, subdued and unromanticised. Grey rocks, darkened green hillside masses and ochre grass are the familiar colours of the winter Nyanga landscape.¹² Texture in the rocks and the foreground scrub is created by the use of the gum resist technique Paul learned from John Piper. [Johnson: 60] Sombre colours and rugged textures are fundamental to the visual language with which Paul communicates the hostility of the land. Rocks and bushes are so near they can be touched but they are so granular, spiky and raw that one is rebuffed from coming too close. Simultaneously soft mists and warm light bathe and blur the harshness of the land. The essence of Robert Paul's painting is ambiguity. In his work, illusionism exists but is made subservient to pictorial needs. The relationship between the scene and the observer is uncertain. Paul's landscape is enigmatic, as is much of Africa to the European sensibility. It calls to the spirit, but rebuffs complacency. Marion Arnold says,

"The physical environment... and the accessibility of the natural world has made a deep impact on most Europeans living in Southern Africa... the spectacular earth and rock formations and wild growth patterns of grass and trees have intruded on the apprehension of the visible world of many inhabitants." [Arnold 1981/1982: 47]

Robert Paul may have used the pictorial constructs of European painting but he opened his heart to the African chimera whose manifestation he facilitated in the guise of paint, colour and form.

Notes

1. Among the first of these were Thomas Baines and Alice Balfour. There has been no coherent 'movement' of painting in Zimbabwe to match that of stone sculpture. If any single aspect links many painters in the country it is that of the landscape.
2. During his time with the British South Africa Police Paul was given the task of charting and mapping the Gwercu-Masvingo area. He travelled and sketched on horseback patrols, usually of six-weeks duration.
3. Two other notable painters have also looked to Nyanga. Thomas Mukarobgwa, who comes from the area, locates all his paintings there. Kingsley Sambo, whose favourite retreat was Nyanga, said "It is exciting, you know, that landscape... it's terrific." Many of the lesser landscape painters in Zimbabwe have rendered the Nyanga landscape but they have sweetened it with saccharine colours and soft outlines.
4. Brian Bradshaw's poetic interpretation of Paul's paintings claims that, "The structures of their formation are not systematic as in grammar. They are too deep for that. Too earnest. Too sensitised. They are cataclysmic." [1978: 28]
5. Paul first met Piper in the 1930s. In 1948 Paul visited England where he spent time with Piper and Hitchens and returned to Africa with several of Piper's paintings. [Johnson: 33] Contemporary English painting of the first half of the twentieth century was influenced, through the critical encouragement of Clive Bell and Roger Fry, by the formal innovations of modernism as devised by the French Post-Impressionist painters, particularly Paul Cezanne.
6. Johnson notes that Paul would sketch while his son fished the Nyanga rivers.
7. The author acknowledges that the correct current spelling is 'Nyangani' but chooses to use the spelling in the original title given to the work.
8. Paul used combinations of oil and egg tempera as well as gum resist which he learned from John Piper. [Johnson: 60] In using gum resist as a technique water soluble gum is applied to the canvas and covered with water-resistant paint. When the canvas is washed or 'hosed down' the gum dissolves and lifts the paint surface covering it. This creates a particular texture according to the way the gum was applied.
9. The 'golden section' or golden mean was the name given in the nineteenth century to the proportion derived when a line is so divided that the whole of the line is to the greater section what the greater is to the less. It is often claimed that the golden mean is aesthetically superior to all other proportions as it fulfils the criteria of unity in variety. [Osborne 1970: 488]
10. *Sfumato* is the achievement of "smooth and imperceptible transitions between areas of colour like smoke dissolving in the air." [Osborne 1970: 1061]
11. Paul Cezanne formulated a concept of multiple view points and the unification of the front and back planes of the landscape through the device he called 'passage'. This linked foreground and background into a unified, flattened, two-dimensional planar structure. Cezanne's pictorial means are present in Robert Paul's work indicating that Paul was conversant with the theories of modernism. It is quite possible that, through his association with English artists in 1948 Paul became aware of Cezanne's contribution to modernism and had a knowledge of the pictorial devices used by Cezanne.
12. Most of Robert Paul's figurative landscapes were painted after 1965 when economic sanctions by the West were imposed on Rhodesia following the Unilateral Declaration of Independence. Sanctions resulted in a scarcity of imported paints and pigments. The colours in Paul's work suggest that he utilised the more common 'earth' pigments. These would have been available as they are the basic pigments of commercial and industrial paints.

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1894 — 1994

100 years at 110 Livingstone Avenue

1894	Stand 1951 of Salisbury Township Lands granted to Edward Vigne by Deed of Grant no. 826 of 19th May
1900	Transferred to George Andrew Tucker for 700
1901	Transferred to Leonard Charles Wigg. Plans for alterations to link the existing buildings with a corrugated iron roof and timber supported verandah drawn up
1902	Transferred to James Ffolliott Darling
1907	Transferred to Robert Warner
1912	Transferred to Transvaal and Rhodesia Estates Ltd
1922	Transferred to Alfred Roland Cooke
1928	(14th February)Transferred to Ethel Mary Cooper
1928	(9th November) Transferred to Marie Louise Hawkings
1933	Occupied by Dreen Hawkings, daughter of Marie Louise
1937	Robert Paul moved in on his marriage to Dreen Hawkings
1953	Transferred to Dreen Paul
1980	Robert Paul died
1981	Dreen Paul died. House offered by Colette Wiles to Derek Huggins
1983	Inherited by Colette Wiles and Paul Paul
1991	Offered to Gallery Delta. Application for Change of Use to gallery purposes granted, renovations carried out and Gallery Delta inauguration
1994	Centenary of 110 Livingstone Avenue



Luis Meque, 110 Livingstone Avenue, 1994, 29 x 21 cm, brush and ink

From Manica Road...



Ito Battigelli

...to Livingstone Avenue



Ito Battigelli

Robert Paul, 110 Livingstone Avenue, 1978, pen and ink

Notes on the transformation taken
from letters by Derek Huggins

Gallery Delta at Robert Paul's House

1st May 1991

...It was early in the year - mid January - when I received the notification to vacate the space at Strachan's Building by the end of February. Happy New Year. My initial reaction, even although I had suspected it would come sooner or later, was of disappointment, anger and resentment. Having worked so hard and long to keep the gallery alive... And the thought of moving all the paraphernalia, even if one found a space to go to, seemed all too much. I thought about... leaving for Europe on walk-about... but it seemed sensible to keep the gallery alive, if possible, in another space providing that space was as good if not better than the one I had had for sixteen years. And so I sought an extension of the deadline until April end, sought legal advice as to my rights as a tenant if it came to a fight and began to look around for another space. But that did not come... The law here being sympathetic to sitting tenants there was always the possibility of sitting tight, accepting an eviction order and appealing which might take up to one year to resolve. I wrestled with that one but it gave me more peace of mind to resign myself to getting out rather than procrastinating. And once I had made that decision to go, new space or no, things began to open... and more latterly, the offer of Robert Paul's old house at 110 Livingstone Avenue as a gallery... The old house dates to 1894, a settler's house rather than colonial, with a simple line - more like an old farm house and barn - and is rustic and now very dilapidated. I used to visit Robert Paul there. He would be sitting just inside the front door drinking his gin and water, or vodka and water, or cane and water, and chain smoking, stubbing out the ends in a tin lid. "Have a drink," he would say. And when I declined with the explanation that ten o'clock in the morning was too early he would be disgusted with me. A distinguished looking man with a fine face, quick mind and biting wit... Colette, Robert Paul's daughter, first offered me the house about ten years ago as a base for the Foundation. Recently, she had

offered it again. When I went there for another look and sat in the lounge and thought about Robert Paul I got a tingle up the spine. The place can make a good gallery - it is an L shape - and is very walk through, having length and interesting areas... a big restoration and conservation job to do. There is the historical aspect - one of the few very early settlers' homes that still survive unaltered - and the art connection. Further, that Colette and her brother Paul, want to preserve it and turn it over to a useful function in deference to their father and their childhood there. And we have the basis of an agreement - the sharing of a concept - to restore and turn the old house into a gallery.

19th June 1991

...we begin to work in the garden. I have always wanted to wield a machete in the jungle. Spent the last two days hacking away at a giant bougainvillea creeper which has gone wild over the last fifty years or more... It will be a wonderful gallery in the end. Does one ever stop fixing? I am excited by the challenge and know I can fix it. It has got a very good feeling for me.

20th June 1991

...The upshot of it all is that I am in with a chance for another space and a unique one at that... Much depends on how quickly I can get the front part of the house operational as a gallery so to make a start and have something to sell... I am already attached to the place and it takes on warmth and friendliness more so every time I go there. Maybe old Robert doesn't think I'm stupid after all. We shall of course have a room for his work as a little museum and shall call it Gallery Delta at Robert Paul's House.

4th July 1994

...The garden - about half an acre - had not been touched for years... we have been cleaning out the rubbish pit, sifting the



**Top: The side verandah
Paul's old studio.
Above: The front verandah at an
early stage of reconstruction.
Below: the building team.**



compost of plastics and bottles, taking out poor tree specimens, building rockeries and clearing a parking lot. We begin, after three weeks, to find we have some semblance of future order... Another week around the outside should have us feeling more comfortable and then I will begin inside. There is a lot of work to do. But the ideas start to come. There is an interesting area at the side with a wonderful old tree with great gnarled roots and where I think I shall establish a miniature theatre... And there is another enclosed area at the back - rather like the yard of a farmhouse - where we could have a patio and serve tea... So little by little there is some progress.

23rd September 1991

...A little over a month ago we moved into the house and began to fix the inside front. Chased out plaster in two rooms - the oldest 'railway carriage' part - and replastered. Filled in some doorways, opened others. Repaired window frames and sills. Floor boards repaired. Then turned to the front verandah and took the tin roof off to restore wood beams etc. At the moment they are still off while we wait for a friend to make timber columns as per the original plan. Presently moving French windows to restore the original look to the front of the house... It is a big job, bigger than I anticipated and consequently taking longer than I had thought but we make progress... perhaps by November I can put in the first show.

28th December 1991

...more busy than ever with the restoration and repair work... There was the need to get a show in and open before the end of the year... It was a big job overall... but somehow we pulled everything together by the 3rd December when we opened with paintings and drawings by Robert Paul. I thanked a lot of people at the opening for their encouragement and support and in no small measure Charles and Antonio, the carpenter and his plasterer mate, and their aides, who had worked so wonderfully well. It was a splendid opening. A large and good natured crowd who put a seal of approval on all... The gallery is a success. It... works well for the display of art... we are in and operating... people say they are amazed, after the loss of our other old and quaint space, that we have been able to come up with another as good and better. The house has a very gentle and pleasant feeling to it... A strange year and a busy one in transition and striving patiently all the time to create something new and good from the old... If I had had a million I could not necessarily have come up with this place or anything like it... It is better than I could ever have envisioned...

12th March 1992

...things become better organised and slip into a steady rhythm of exhibitions and restoration... work is concentrated at the rear of the premises... This part of the building was almost derelict, disused and had been badly vandalised by squatters who came over the back wall for shelter and tore up the floorboards and pulled out the windows to burn. I walk around the house a dozen or more times a day to keep an eye on the progress of my small team of workers... They have done a very good and steady job... they seem able to fix everything little by little. Every day, every week, every month we progress and it will be done... When I started I did not know the end of it, nor even the middle, nor even the morrow but money has come on line as necessary and donations too, of bricks, guttering, wood and other essentials. When I think about it, when I sit and look at the front of the building, I remark to myself that it is better than I envisaged. The change is remarkable, although the character has not been lost... So far, in our new space we have mounted five exhibitions: Robert Paul, and the group Summer Show in December; Young Artists and Bickle/Caponnetto in February and a Graphics Show this month... If one has a project to work it becomes a way of life and one worries and thinks less. When the work is finished it will be a very good, indeed unique space and place. It becomes that way already.

15th March 1992

...It was a scramble to open the gallery by the 3rd December but we had committed ourselves a month before. Artist friends sneaking a look at our colossal muddle thought we would never make it... We finished

whitewashing the front walls at 4 p.m. on the day we opened at 5.30 p.m. so close was the call... plans are bearing fruit little by little. Robert Paul is, I think, happy - the feeling about and in this place is very good and I cannot help (thinking) it is meant to be.

18th March 1992

...In January we moved our repair and restoration operation to the very back of the stand - repairing walls, toilets, kia - so that it should be done before we ran out of money and energy. Then during February, we moved into the very derelict old kitchen area (1894) with local brick of that time and dagga walls which, in places, with the rains and rotten gutters, had turned once again to soil and mud. More recently, this month, we have been working in the 1901 extension area at the rear bedroom and now we put in the ceiling and the roof back on the kitchen area... We are paving a parking area and path. Quite active. The old house, while retaining its rhythm and character, is smartening up considerably. Already it makes a good and unique gallery and when we have finished the repairs - opening up the space - a floors, doors, windows and walls job, we shall have... accessibility all around the premises. We shall make a better kitchen, open up part of the rear verandah and build an auditorium at the side for a theatre for 100 audience. Already, the theatricals are showing interest in the proposed intimate 'under the tree theatre on the other side'. It's a good project, seems right and Robert Paul's shade hasn't dropped any bricks yet.

23rd May 1992

...On Thursday last I was very happy. We pulled out the wall of the old kitchen... and what a difference it makes. Light of the winter sunshine from the north now pours through the French window into the main gallery - the old drawing room - and one has a much better view of the rear courtyard which now comes into play. We have enclosed a small area of the rear verandah ourselves and knocked out what passed as a bathroom to create a new kitchen... The rear courtyard will become a space for the display of sculpture and the open rear verandah for relaxation. The character remains but we have lost the ageing, the patina so to speak, but this will recur in time. Often I go to the end of the garden to sit and cast my eyes about the front of the house, over and along the simple 'railway carriage' verandah, to the red corrugated iron roof and the stalwart chimneys and across the two gables... How many times did I sit and wonder, when the verandah was off and the work there in progress, how it would look?

7th August 1992

...The major structural work has been completed and we begin to titivate - fascia boards, guttering, painting... We still have to bring on line one third of the space for exhibition purposes. Then we shall have sufficient space for changing and permanent collections. In the end we shall have saved what claims to be the oldest house in Harare - and if not the oldest, the most intact - which has historical, architectural and artistic background... to be used as an art and cultural centre... slowly we succeed. Meantime, we run exhibitions in part of the space to keep ourselves alive.

30th September 1992

...Over the last two weeks the gutters and down pipes have gone on - the eye lashes - in good time for the rains. More satisfying even, I was able to give the instruction to Charles, my building team foreman, to "Take down that wall", meaning the blocking wall in the hall. I had looked forward to it for a year. Many years ago the wide hall, the major axis in the house, had been blocked, originally with tongue and groove ceiling board in which a little door had been cut, and subsequently by a red brick wall and covered over with board, paper and paint. We uncovered all about a year ago but left the red brick wall to hide the dereliction behind it. In December we knocked out one brick to provide a peep hole to view Michiel Dolk's installation of 'House in Construction' in tribute to Malevich, which he put within the derelict part; and later Rebecca Garrett's 'Dormant Space Waiting to Come to Life'. The old man, Madala Mozambique, took down the wall which he called the ant hill, layer by layer, to expose the 'new' renovated space on the other side. Revelation for all concerned. Suddenly the space came alive,



Ito Batigelli



James Hazlett

Top: The back verandah area before and Above: after reconstruction.

cross lighting working beautifully, as the two parts of the 'L' were joined again. It was indeed a major breakthrough... We have now brought on line all the extra space... Already Helen calls the new big room the 'Cathedral Room'. It is set off by two magnificent tall double doors and high ceiling, and has a wonderful still feeling within. Today we commenced marking out the area to this side of the house which will become the amphitheatre... Want to excavate the old well also and if we get water we shall have a garden all year round... The use of the amphitheatre for meetings, lectures, slide shows, workshops, plays and music should give us an additional buzz.

1st December 1992

...we hurried to get the guttering on, to batten down the corrugated iron sheets... and to press on with the building of the amphitheatre and to dig and line the well before the onset of the rains... all our effort is presently about the theatre area which takes form and volume and shape, sweeping in a semi-circle towards and up to the belambra tree, the roots of which surround and grow over the opening to the well. We have dug to twelve metres and more now... in all probability, the well had been the first job for those pioneer builders - to establish water supply - and... the yellow clay removed was to become sun-baked bricks for the original kitchen...

31st December 1992

...We finish the year as survivors with a great deal of consolidation gone before. At 110 Livingstone Avenue



Top: The side of the old house before reconstruction.
Above: The new theatre area.
Below: A view of the new gallery at its present state of completion.



there is a sense of order... The amphitheatre is nearly finished - just the area around the tree and some stepping down to complete. Crispin and his mates, Sebastian and Kosta, finished digging out the old well... at seventeen metres deep on rock bottom amidst rock walls... We let it fill and it did so, gurgling... within a week and up to about five metres from the top. The water runs in, wells in through the rock. It seems to be a good well worthy of two or three metres a day or four or five hundred gallons a day... We shall cap it soon and mount, hopefully, an old hand pump of the twenties as a feature, a practical one, in midst the tree roots and pump to a tank nearby and run it off to the garden.

21st February 1993

...We worked January and into February to complete the amphitheatre... Took on the Black Umfolozi, a Ndebele song and dance act from Bulawayo, for the 12th February to test the space and the acoustics... The space is most pleasant situated under the branches of the belambra, wild syringa and a lightning scarred msasa... We had some tensions with the Black Umfolozi promotion. They were late to arrive and so we were unable to rig and set and test their lighting the night before. Then at about 5 o'clock we had a big storm with torrential rain, the dimmer board fused, and a short circuit in the wiring held us up for half an hour. We got away with it however, the rain disappearing and the stars appearing, and good old John Alsford fixing the circuits. In all we played six nights to good receptive audiences, somehow by the grace of God missing the heavy showers and storms that knocked about daily...

7th March 1993

...Last week we pulled up the front verandah floor - old bricks covered by a thin layer of cement - and re-laid it with concrete slab and mortar top with red oxide surface... we returned to the amphitheatre area where Michiel Dolk, the installation artist, has been for a week or two, translating his concept of a geometric design into reality... marking up and beginning to lay mortar coloured with red, yellow and black oxides, plus white cement. It is experimental... In building and making new projects reality, there are always so many options to think and talk about but gradually all comes down to simplicity and practicality and that which is right, feels right, has integrity and is aesthetically pleasing...

14th June 1993

...At last, I have moved into the room I always envisioned as my office. It is the last little room of the original kitchen block at the rear where it is more quiet and isolated. It has a fireplace and a big window which gives me ample light and being north facing gives me winter sunshine and summer shade. I think I shall be happy there and now that I am more or less established do not intend to move. We have embarked on the last major job - to build a wall along the front of the property... We shall commence bricklaying tomorrow. At last I can say with some surety another month or two and we shall be finished.

26th August 1993

...built a marvellous wall in 'klinker' brick and set the sliding gate we had taken from the rear. Then we tidied up - numerous small jobs - about the amphitheatre and its decoration; woodwork within the house to maximise convenience - some shelving in my office... and so it carried on... seemingly endlessly... and almost finally to make and hammer home the finials on the apex of all the three gables. In early August, on or about the 7th, and almost exactly two years after the builders began, we called it a day with the promise that Charles and crew come back next year to build a small store-room and pave the entrance from the road to the gate and the interleading paths around the garden... So I say I have been a long way out and am at last returning... I have a wonderful gallery in a marvellous old house... □



To those who helped — thank you

The restoration project at 110 Livingstone Avenue, during the period June 1991 to August 1993, was made possible by people whose empathy and generosity was such that they voluntarily contributed in services, money or in kind.

On behalf of Gallery Delta, I wish to record, acknowledge and thank publicly all of the following:

Colette Wiles
Paul Paul
Mick Pearce
Peter Jackson
Tony Machado
Jenny Farquharson
David Peech
Richard Jack
Hamish Jardine
Neale Morgan
Arthur Azevedo
Margie Robertson
Nick Murgatroyd
Ros Byrne
James Logan
Birgitta Berggren (Sweden)
Tom Blenkinsop
Murray McCartney
Mary Davies
Kay Graham
Dora Cavill
The late George Seirlis
Brenda Fitzgerald
Alan Radford

Joan Stuart
Leora Fintz
Volker Wild (Germany)
Margaret & Tony Weare (England)
Sue McCormick
Joerg Sorgenicht (Papua New Guinea)
Simon Back
Rosemary Trewartha
Fried Lutz
Robert Loder (England)
Dorothea & Charles Johnson (England)
Daryl Nero
Ian White
Michael Curling
James Murray
James Hazlett (England)
Clive Jordan (England)
Juliet Copperi
Jack Bennett
Christian & Eva Schlaga (USA)
Anna Fleming
Helen Lieros
Philippe & Therese Grosclaude (Switzerland)
Caroline Thornycroft

and

the Development Co-operation Office of the Swedish Embassy (SIDA — Mr Bengt Troedsson)
for the grant in aid for the amphitheatre and Michiel Dolk for its design

and

Charles Nyamutemba (Foreman)
Samson Antonio
Francis Jeta
Mario Katamigo

all members of the building team whose workmanship in wresting back a dilapidated and derelict building to that which it is today was beyond imagination.

To all, heartfelt appreciation and thanks

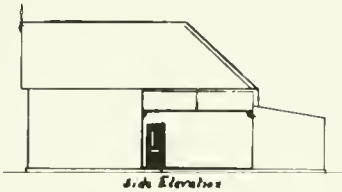
Derek Huggins

Conservation of our old buildings
entails much more than
just physical renovation
as Peter Jackson emphasises

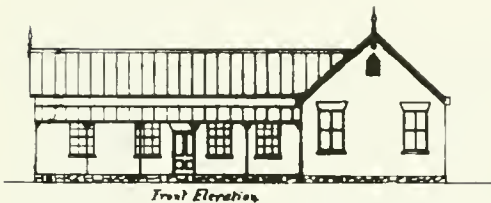
Pleasure & Privilege

Proposed Additions to Mr. Nigga House.

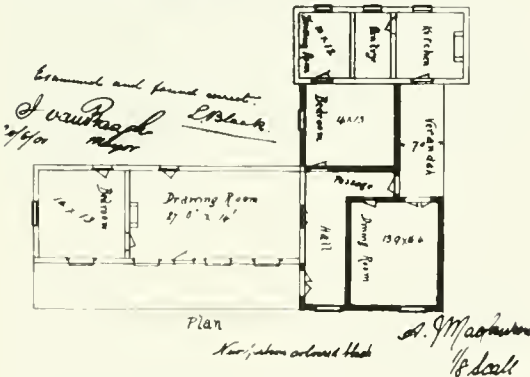
PLAN 314



Side Elevation



Front Elevation



Plan 314 dated 6.01
for additions
to the original house
at 110 Livingstone Avenue

It was late in 1986 when I was first shown 110 Livingstone Avenue. The property was in a very run-down and neglected state with two school teachers living in it in virtual squatter conditions. The house was extremely shabby, hidden in a wildly overgrown and tangled garden, the front verandah partly missing and the rest filled in. The rear area was derelict and uninhabitable, but I was excited to have found such a relatively intact example of one of Harare's earliest brick buildings.

Despite the poverty of its appearance, the original architectural character of the house remained intact. The 'railway carriage' plan of the 1894 part of the structure was an excellent example of frugal architecture from the earliest years of colonial settlement in Zimbabwe. It was not difficult to imagine this tall, narrow, initially thatched building standing almost alone in the African bush, lines of sapling Jacarandas being the only indication of Livingstone Avenue, the road itself barely a track, criss-crossed with footpaths and cycle tracks. There would have been a few other houses going up around, in the newly pegged suburb of Greenwood Park, but not all of them being built in brick; many would have been pole and dagga rondavels. I saw it as a fine and beautifully simple early structure, typified by narrow rooms, the steeply pitched roof without eaves, and the small window openings, and I longed to be able to restore it!

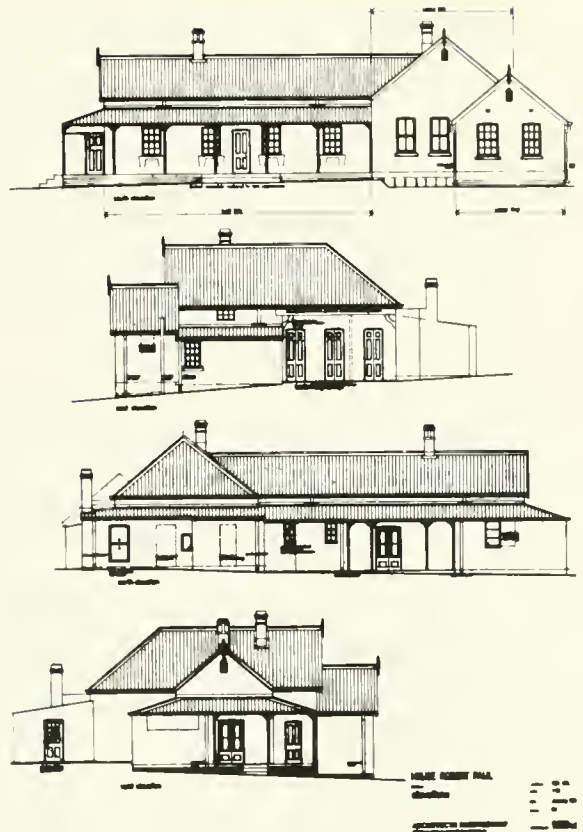
Why do some of us care so much about the past? Why is it so important to preserve some of our old buildings rather than more optimally redevelop the land on which they stand? The brilliant environmental engineer Buckminster Fuller wrote: "Hope in the future is rooted in the memory of the past, for without memory there is no history and no knowledge. No projection of the future can be formed without reference to the past. Past, present and future, memory and prophecy, are woven together into one continuous whole. In a clear understanding of the past lies the hope of our future."

It is certainly my own belief that the purpose of conservation is not merely to preserve our towns as museums, but is rather to enhance and develop their character and identity through considered and meaningful change. The historic elements of our towns and cities form an important part of our national collective memory. They reflect the recent history of the region, the period of colonial expansion and domination, the era that created much of the shape and texture which our urban settlements possess today.

In the mid-seventies, under the local Town Planning Scheme, 110 Livingstone Avenue was zoned for use as residential flats and its redevelopment value was thus enhanced considerably in excess of its value while supporting only a single dwelling. An alternative commercial use therefore seemed a way to be able to support the costs of renovation and restoration, but in recent years the Department of Works has been actively resisting commercial pressures encroaching into the residential Avenues.

The need to find new premises for Gallery Delta seemed an ideal opportunity for creative conservation, to try to combine Robert Paul's ancient house with the needs of a dynamic and experimental art gallery. On behalf of Gallery Delta, Architect Mick Pearce made application in April

Top: Front elevation of the reconstructed house.
Right: Back elevation.
Below: West elevation showing the new theatre area.
Bottom: East elevation showing Robert Paul's old studio area of the verandah.



1991 to the City Council for a Change of Use to gallery purposes. This was entirely outside the scope of our rigid Town Planning Scheme, but in the context of recently proposed Historic Buildings Regulations, as well as the undisputed historical significance of the building, the Department of Works responded positively and agreed to publicly advertise the proposed change through the Special Consent process.

While waiting for Municipal approval, Derek Huggins was extremely anxious to begin renovations. The former gallery had been forced to vacate Strachan's Building in March, and was without any other premises. However, without formal planning and building approval, any work carried out could be at risk. One day, Derek rang to tell me that he couldn't wait any longer, and that he had already started to do the minimum necessary to be able to re-open as soon as possible. With only limited funds available, he planned to carry out essential repairs, minor alterations and basic redecoration. So please would I come and have a look and reassure him that the work was appropriate and satisfactory. I didn't need asking twice!

Our first task together was to agree the positions and shapes of the new openings to create a dynamic axis to link the variety of spaces available within the house. Derek agreed to re-locate doors and windows in order to restore the front elevation to its early appearance. In 1901, the thatched roof had been replaced with corrugated iron, which linked the original rooms with the new rooms built on the eastern side of the house. The timber verandah also added was typical of the upgrading of buildings that took place about the turn of the century, as the town began to discard its early pole and dagga image. We were delighted to accept an offer to replicate the original verandah, one timber post with its carved tracery having survived.

Derek was rightly concerned however, that there would be insufficient light for the display of paintings, particularly if we changed the positions of the old French windows and restored the verandah along the front. I believed that, if the lean-to kitchen along the back were to be opened up, and the rear verandah similarly restored, this would provide an extra source of light to counter the shading of the already small window openings along the front. By now the building had been surveyed, and a set of reconstruction drawings prepared. It was clear that we were doing far more than just redecorating, particularly as Friends of Delta were so generous with donations of cash and materials, including the recreated Oregon pine verandah posts, bricks and Victorian profiled guttering. Sculptor Arthur Azevedo's distinctive security grilles gave the building a necessary and magical continuity with the original Gallery Delta.

The reconstruction work was carried out, under the supervision of Derek Huggins, by a small building team led by Charles Nyamutemba. The Chief Building Inspector and his officers were kept fully informed of what we were doing. No objections were received to the planning application for Special Consent, and a Permit for Public Building (Gallery) Use was eventually granted on 3rd December 1991, the very day that Gallery Delta re-opened with a special commemorative exhibition of the works of Robert Paul. There is a condition in the Planning Permit requiring regular public access to the house, to which the new use ideally lends itself.

The response of the arts community to the new venue was tremendous and further donations meant that renovation work could now continue on the derelict back portion of the property. Funds were provided for the construction of a 100-person amphitheatre focused on a side verandah of the house, which anyway required complete reconstruction. This area naturally lent itself to development as a small stage, with the former window openings being extended to contain three tall Oregon pine framed glazed doors which ambiguously serve either as windows to the gallery within, and as an abstract backdrop to the stage. Within the amphitheatre was the former well which Derek was having dug out to find water, and for which we were able to locate a 50-year old hand pump. It was a very exciting day indeed when the matchboard partition, which had separated the front and back halves of the house for many years, was able to be stripped away. The whole house was immediately transformed, all of it at last becoming available for a good variety of walk-through spaces.

The renovations were finally completed in 1992, but there was still a boundary wall to construct and the landscaping of the garden to be completed, which work continued well into 1993. The last exercise will be to provide a removable roof over the amphitheatre seating, which must not detract from the character of the house, but which will enable the stage facility to be used at any time of the year.

What made it such a special experience for myself, was to watch the building transform under the careful and patient hands of Derek, Charles and the other builders; seeing it ever moving closer to the image that I had formed the very first time I saw the house. It felt a

privilege to assist them realize that transformation, in what I considered to be a very important early building, if not the oldest extant house in the city. It has certainly given me as much pleasure as any building project on which I have ever been involved, and was profoundly therapeutic!

This project has not only given Gallery Delta a much needed home and future security, but has saved for Harare, an excellent example of its earliest urban architecture, and in such a way as to reasonably guarantee its survival well into the 21st century. It is not a museum, it has had to

change to adapt to its new function, while at the same time re-establishing its architectural integrity. In celebrating its special association with Robert Paul, the house looks back, as well as forward to the future. Very often one can find young artists painting in the garden, on the verandah or in the theatre. Far from becoming just a showcase, 110 Livingstone Avenue has become a vibrant focus for artistic growth; a place of questioning, of testing aspirations; of making visions of the present and the past, for the future.

I think Robert Paul would like that. ☐

Reviews of recent work and forthcoming exhibitions and events

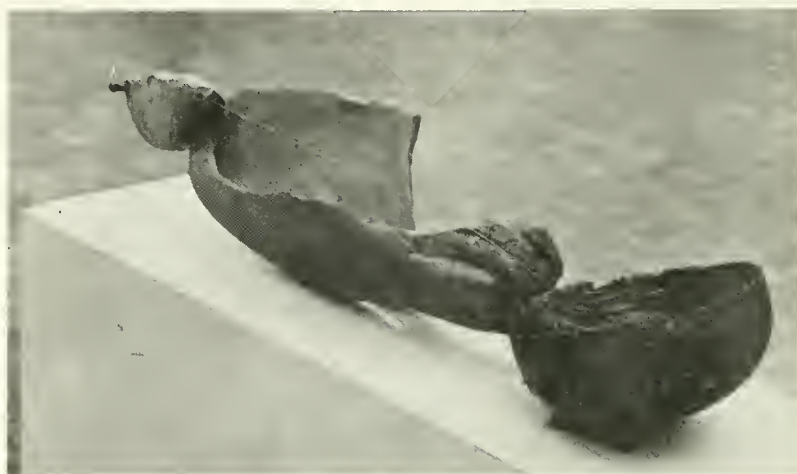
Women Visual Artists Exhibition, National Gallery, August 1994

Sixty one paintings, graphics, ceramics and textiles were selected by three prominent women artists for this exhibition. Some works were distinctly female in context, women working, weaving, with children; a few had a political statement to make such as *I am not the one* by Joan Dunstan; others dealt with the wider human experience. The 18-25 years painting award went to Portia Stocker for *Pride*.



Portia Stocker, *Pride*

Stocker applies her oil paint thickly in clearly delineated areas. The two boys, smart in their striped shirts, stare balefully at the viewer. The larger than life size heads demand our attention while the hunched little shoulders, inertly hanging arms and incomplete bodies convey an impression of weakness.



Stoffer Geiling

Semina Mpofu, *Female Harp*

The 18-25 sculpture award went to Semina Mpofu for *Female Harp*. This is an evocative work with its poised stone head piece and single metal string stretching over the delicate broken hollow bowl of the body, culminating in the roughened metal mbira. The supine position emphasises both sexuality and vulnerability.

Women artists inevitably express their femaleness and, while categorising can be interesting for sociological or political inference, in the end what matters is that the individuals regardless of sex communicate their experience convincingly.

Is this 'affirmative action' exhibition necessary? While white Zimbabwean women artists have always exhibited alongside their male counterparts, traditionally black women were limited to crafts

and decoration and it is only recently that they have been able to express themselves through paint and sculpture. Judging by this show, women artists don't need special treatment. Their work can certainly be exhibited on equal terms with male artists.

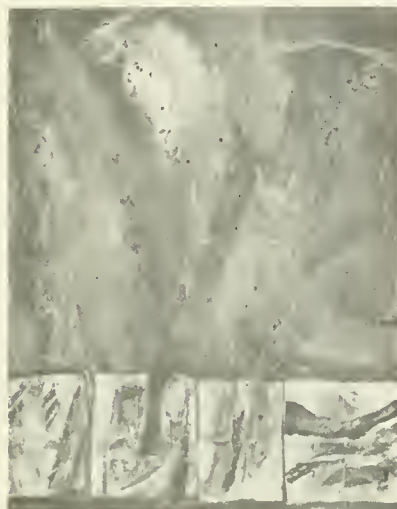
Pity that the book publishing house which sponsors the exhibition does not see fit to publish a decent catalogue!

Harare Polytechnic Fine Art Students Past and Present, National Gallery, August 1994

This exhibition represented work from the first intake of fine art students (1991) to the present time. Notable was work by Tendai Gumbo now in her final year. Her printed, tie-dyed, batiked, cut and resewn textiles and mixed media ceramics

show an experimental approach to materials and her graphics and paintings, much energy and self expression. The range of innovative ceramics made a welcome change from the technically perfect bowls or traditional style pots commonly exhibited.

Works by Prominent Contemporary Artists in Zimbabwe, Gallery Delta, July 1994



Helen Lleros, Tribal Land

Twelve of Zimbabwe's well-known artists exhibited including Helen Lleros who is exploring the complexities of her dual inheritance, the Greek and the Zimbabwean. In *Tribal Land* she incorporates fragments of newspapers sent from Athens for her late father, intermeshing them with her vigorous expression of African colour and myth.

Tapfuma Gutsa exhibited *San King* (see contents page) created from mixed metals. Also on this exhibition was Richard Jack's work *Sharing*, a successful combination of three simple elements: an anchoring block of polished wood, an energetic zigzag of rough textured steel which engages the eye in vertical, horizontal and diagonal movement, and a smoothly carved stone fruit/seed pod making its offering.

Young Artists of Promise, Gallery Delta, August 1994

This exhibition showed a range of work in strongly individualistic modes of expression by twelve young artists. Crispin Matekenya brings movement, humour and energy to wood in his treatment of always very human and personal subjects such as *Bathing the Child* or *The Musician, The Dancers*.



Crispin Matekenya, The Musician, The Dancers

Forthcoming exhibitions and events (provisional)

The Heritage Exhibition opens at the National Gallery in November. With their new policy of including both foreign and local selectors, the National Gallery is hoping to rescue the standard of the exhibition which had led to so much public criticism in the last few years. According to comments at the Forum meeting, the selection has been rigorous this year and the selectors have agreed to a 'walkabout' when they will defend their choices in discussion with artists and the public.

The Goethe Institute has commissioned Adda Geiling, Luis Meque and Richard Jack to do three large canvases for their new offices at 162 Harare Street. The theme of the works is 'the city'.

Zim Sculpture (Pachipamwe) Workshop is being held at Tapfuma Gutsa's place at Shurugwe in September/October. Artists from Zimbabwe and abroad will include Vote Thebe and Nicholas Mukomberanwa. There will be an Open Day. For details contact Taylor Nkomo at the National Gallery.

Pero Rajkovic will be exhibiting at Gallery Delta in October. Rajkovic, a Yugoslavian painter visiting Zimbabwe from war devastated Belgrade, says he seeks to express in his art something beyond the horrific present, to offer hope.

Sylvia Bews-Wright, a Canadian painter, will be showing work at Gallery Delta in November. The exhibition "Partitions" will be mainly acrylics with strong political content.

Berry Bickle and possibly **Fatima Fernandez** will exhibit at Gallery Delta in November. Recently returned from the Biennale in Cuba and from a period of painting in Mozambique, Berry should have some interesting work to show.

Betrayal by Harold Pinter will be performed at Gallery Delta in October, produced by Graham Crutchley.



Richard Jack, Sharing

Stoffer Geiling

Alan Allen

Alan Allen

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The art magazine from Gallery Delta

No 2

Sponsoring art for Zimbabwe

Gallery Delta, the publisher and the editor gratefully acknowledge the following sponsors who have contributed to the production of this issue of *Gallery* magazine:

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Cover: Michiel Dolk, *Cabo Delgado* (detail), 1994, marble
Collection: Murray McCartney. Photo: Danielle Deudney
Left: Harry Mutasa, *Elephant in Quicksand*, 1994, 30cm, metal



Stoffer Geiling

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Publisher: Derek Huggins. Editor: Barbara Murray. Design Team: Barbara Murray & Myrtle Mallis. DTP: Myrtle Mallis. Origination & printing: A.W. Bardwell & Co. Colour: Colourscan (Pvt) Ltd.

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Subscriptions from Gallery Publications, P.O. Box UA 373,
Union Avenue, Harare. Tel: (14) 792135.

Artnotes

"I am really glad to hear that something is going ahead in Zimbabwe on the art scene. What has worried me terribly is the lack of criticality and engagement with issues — continuous praise has done no one any good at all and now that SA is back in the world the competition for 'Africanness' is going to be tough."

Marion Arnold writing from Cape Town highlights our need for criticism, interpretation and discussion which are essential to the growth of challenging art. That continuous praise is good for no one is evident in the proliferation of mediocre and derivative work. Some incisive criticism is needed.

Criticism can be positive and constructive, a contribution to development and change, a good teacher. Artists produce their work to be seen, to communicate. They want and need response. If the response is not all positive it may help them to look and think again. Comment can open viewers and artists to new possibilities, alternative perspectives.

Without a local art school to create an atmosphere of rational discussion and examination of art, criticism has come to be seen in Zimbabwe as personal and negative. Another correspondent says:

"Writing about contemporary art in this small community is a can of worms."

Well let's open the can so the worms can eat away some of the dead wood in our art to make way for new growth. To extend the metaphor, most plants benefit from a little judicious pruning.

Equally worth considering in Marion's letter is the suggestion that nothing has been happening on the art scene in Zimbabwe. This is far from true as the articles in this issue indicate, but we need to make ourselves seen and heard both inside and outside the country. Recent visitors have been impressed with some of the work they've seen and artists are being invited to exhibit overseas.

In November, Tapfuma Gutsa, Luis Meque and Keston Beaton travelled to Germany as guests of the Gallerie Munsterland in Emsdetten who will host an exhibition

entitled 'Genesis' next year. The curators came to Zimbabwe on the Shona sculpture trail and were depressed with what they found. However at Gallery Delta they were shown what Zimbabwean artists are capable of creating. Gallerie Munsterland aim to facilitate interaction and to this end three German artists will come to Zimbabwe early in 1995. All six artists will then work towards the exhibition in September 1995. The necessity to explain their work and articulate their concerns to the more critical German audience will be beneficial for Zimbabwe's three representatives and hopefully have spin-offs for the local scene.

Seven local artists, Gerry Dixon, Crispen Matakanya, Luis Meque, Stephen Williams, Richard Jack, Anderson Mukomberanwa and Bernard Takawira, will have work in an exhibition of art from southern Africa entitled 'SANAA Africa'. This exhibition, organised by the Norwegian Museum of Contemporary Art, will tour Norway from February 1995 for 12 months.

Sue McCormick recently brought Zimbabwean art to international notice when she won 2nd prize in the Gualdo Tadino (Perugia) 34th International Exhibition of Ceramic Art for her wall piece entitled 'Solidarity'. Constructed of clay tiles of varied size and prominence, the piece depicts three female figures and a pot, with beads and copper wire as added elements. Some parts of the surface are burnished while the background is subtly coloured using brushwork with slips and oxides. The prestigious and lucrative first prize of Z\$25,000 draws work from many countries which this year included Norway, Russia, Lithuania, Switzerland, Greece, Japan and Italy among others. Congratulations, Sue!

But while our artists may get recognition abroad, the local scene is more problematic. Culture is not a profit making enterprise. It needs support and sponsorship. Some local companies continue to play an important role through their generous funding of art. In October two major companies in Harare requested paintings and sculpture to show at the opening of their new office buildings. Events such as these bring art to the attention of many who do not visit galleries and offer them something new and stimulating. Sadly some companies as yet do not support local culture as was evidenced in a recent visit to the headquarters of one of the biggest conglomerates. Enshrined in a beautiful frame behind the reception desk

was a piece of commercially printed fabric matching the fabric covering their chairs and sofas! This lack of interest or pride in Zimbabwean culture projects a negative impression to the many visitors who pass through their offices. As one person at the Heritage Exhibition commented:

"When you talk about what could have been done, you have to ask yourself if you have contributed as much as you can."

However, thanks to support from many quarters, things are buzzing. New directions were in evidence at the Zimsculpture Pachipamwe Workshop (see page 3) and if not a show of excellent work, the Heritage Exhibition (see page 7), does demonstrate the range of potential in Zimbabwe. The majority of exhibiting artists are untrained, and much talent is not achieving what it could. We need that art school! Both the President and the Director of the National Gallery mentioned it in passing in their speeches at the Heritage opening. Too much has been said and too little done but hopefully, with a new Director, the project can be made reality.

While we wait for the Zimbabwe School of Art, the Harare Polytechnic is looking for full or part time lecturers in Fine Art to join their effort to develop art in Zimbabwe. If you are interested please write enclosing a CV to the Principal, Attention: Head of Department, Printing and Graphic Arts, Harare Polytechnic, Box CY 407, Causeway, Harare.

Michiel Dolk on page 13 shares thought-provoking perspectives on the conventions of painting and sculpture, challenging artists to consider contemporary art concerns. More deliberate questioning and examination of ideas is necessary if Zimbabwe's art is to establish a living rather than a petrified tradition. Too much emphasis is put on preserving culture, maintaining traditions, making more art for the Heritage cupboard, rather than on exploring alternative possibilities and investigating new concepts, *"making decisive breaks into the new"*.

The Editor

Shurugwe

September/October 1994

By Derek Huggins

"Shona sculpture... it is a dying movement. I think that with John (Takawira) and Ndandarika and other people, the movement went." So asserts the black skinned, lank haired Tapfuma Gutsa, sitting bare chested on the terrace of the Shurugwe Motel.

We have driven the two hundred plus miles from Harare via Gweru to Shurugwe, on wide tar roads, under a mildly grey sky which hints at rain though it seems too early to hope for an end the dry season. Traversing the undulating scrub bush lands south of Chivu, there are vultures, some thirty or forty, gathered on the lip of a donga. The vultures rise lazily and glide away to circle and wait. There is a carcass, a full grown warthog; all that remains is the head and hooves. The flies are thick and noisy and the maggots stirring. Going on, tribes of vervet monkeys cross the road and birds of prey wheel above.

Heralded by a conical hill, the name of which nobody seems to know, with msasa and pine trees covering its slopes, the small town of Shurugwe comes into sight. More old than new, more closed and empty than open and occupied, Shurugwe displays its deserted, verandah-ed streets.

The now-named Shurugwe Motel, situated in the lea of the hill with no name, was if I am not mistaken, a tea garden in the early 60s where Trevor Southey, a young painter, lived. Two of his works are in the Permanent Collection of the National Gallery. He became a mormon, perhaps understandably, and went to Utah. Selukwe, its anglicised colonial name, lost a painter and its only call, so far, to the art history of the country.

Arriving at the motel we espy the form of Gerry Dixon, dressed in track trousers, colourful caftan and imitation guerrilla bush hat, and we know we have homed in on the workshop. We have a lemon drink and slake our thirst while Gerry talks. "Amazing workshop. Worked one week wood, one week stone, one week painting. Amazing. Gentle. Quiet. No hype. No talk. Just work. Got into the stone. So easy to work. Much easier than wood. Absolute despair yesterday. Today at peace. Have got enough stimulation out of it to last me a year. Amazing."

In the dark bar, the ZBC is on the air, pumping out pop music. We move off to see Gerry's



Barbara Murray

Gerry Dixon



Barbara Murray

Rashid Jogee



Barbara Murray

Tapfuma Gutsa

work patch in the middle of a disused, miniature golf course amongst msasa trees. He has chosen Hole number three as his green. Here we look at his found objects in wood, *Buffalo Horns* and *Tuning Fork*, the latter too heavy by far for one to lift. "Tapfuma's place is up the hill through that hole in the fence. Some of the others are working on the terraces, others, the painters and the welders, on a farm ten miles away."

We climb the hill. A Dixon stone sculpture along the path is reminiscent of a Grecian warrior's face and helmet with trimmed plume. There is a vertical snake on the neck. It is an impressive piece.

Govane Ferreira, the Mozambican wood carver from Maputo who exhibited at the National Gallery a few years ago, is working the stone alongside Rashid Jogee. Rashid, pale under his colourful woollen hat, is chipping gently, patiently, resolutely at a big rock with purple intrusions that is lumpy and undramatic in form. Uncovering that which is hidden, and almost as though he has no wish to discover or look or take out that which is within, so gently does he chip. It is as though he is fondling it. He is happy to see us. "I hadn't heard.

Thought the workshop was off. Had a brilliant scene in Bulawayo just before I came: Brenda Fassi in Mpopoma. For me it is a new experience because it is the first workshop I have only worked the stone. There is real stability in it, OK. Painting is so wild... there are so many ups and downs, you see. It's like a wild woman. This has been good for me, the stability. It is patient and steady. I'm developing the stone from its original form. I feel in touch with this stone... just developing it... for ten days... it starts to come. The work becomes light and easy, OK, and then you sing and talk together... and you become in touch with the stone. I've just been preparing it before I really begin to work on it and then get involved... go up gently and come down out of it slowly." Such is Rashid's involvement with his rock, fond and meek.

As we go on up the hill I remember a stanza from Omar Khayyam:

*For I remember stopping by the way
To watch a potter thumping his wet clay:
And with its all-obiterated tongue
It murmur'd — Gently, Brother, gently, pray!*

Looking around the site where the stone is

Voti Thebe



Barbara Murray

dumped, there is, across the track, a severed aeroplane propeller transformed, by Tapfuma Gutsa, into a cycladic-like form by the addition of a wooden head. Nearby Webster Gutsa cuts into a rock to create a termite and its labyrinth.

Terraced hillside and more workers. Dias Machate, from Mozambique, wrestles to wedge home a block of serpentine in a rough hewn tree trunk.

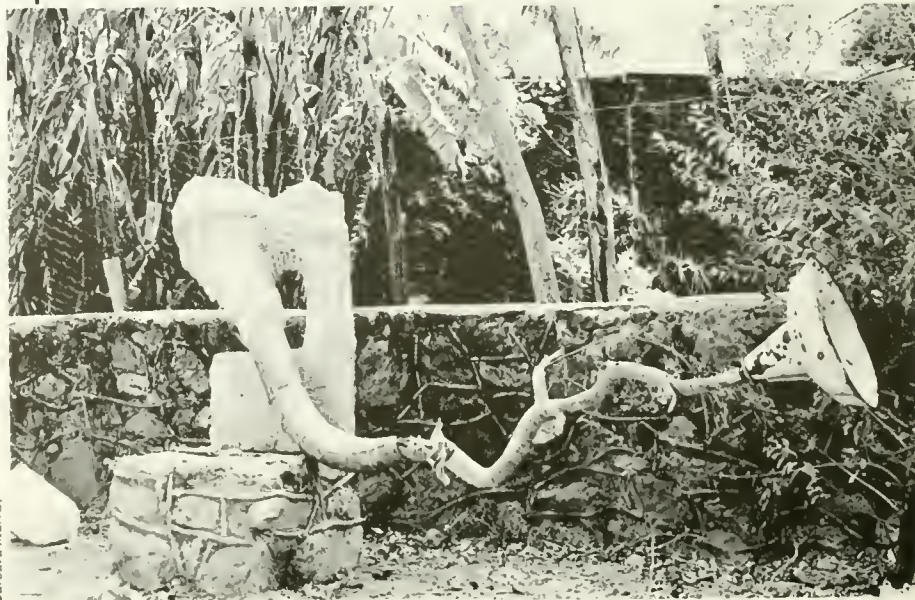
On a retaining wall, a line of metal and mixed media works by Voti Thebe from Bulawayo, of which *Bondage*, or perhaps *Captive Woman*, is the most impressive.

Further along the terrace, Frances Richardson from England is investigating how best to pin wood to stone. The piece on which she works, a curved stone base on which she balances a narrow tree trunk, and the manner in which she endeavours to link one to the other with the aid of two curved metal pins is thoughtful and well designed. She proposes to fix a curvilinear scrap metal piece to the wood, to create perhaps a figure with a lyre?

It looks too much like a Tapfuma Gutsa for my inclination. This is not neutral ground. For here, as we climb the hill, terrace by terrace, the Tapfuma Gutsa influence is strong. Many powerful sculptures stand along these terraces and around the swimming pool, washed and darkened by the water from the sprinkler, which are unmistakably Gutsa's works dating over the last

decade. There are some familiar ones: *The Lovers*, *The Snake*, *The Crashed Out Helicopter...* works that one imagined had sold long ago and been housed in Europe and America, but which have come to rest on these terraces over the last three or four years. Unmistakably, this is the site of an art establishment. How did this happen? Tapfuma homed, I guessed, on the Shurugwe chrome mine to investigate the stone sought after by the sculptors of this land. And finding it, he found a home nearby atop a kopje, in sight of the hill with no name, and with a bar that is the Shurugwe Motel, at the bottom.

Tapfuma Gutsa



Barbara Murray

The stone built cottage on top of the hill is full and alive with paintings and sculptures — by Stephen Williams, Richard Jack, Henry Thompson, Berry Bickle, Rashid Jogee and others — the swops and spoils of annual workshoping, Pachipamwe style, in Zimbabwe. Certainly this is an art site in the midst of the Midlands Province. Incongruous, almost unbelievable, but fact.

Across the hill, the Zambian, Friday Tembo, and the slight, brown skinned Namibian, Silverius Olibile, work side by side. Friday has completed a piece in wood, rather busy in its form, drilled with countless holes. He calls it *Empty Promise...* it depicts a politician. The Namibian works on stone but there is no impressive form here. Perhaps he hasn't worked stone before.

It seems workshop work is experimental, often unresolved, unfinished, even ill conceived and incongruous. The accent is on the experimental, to work new media, and here, on this hill, the tendency to work in mixed media is apparent. While this may be a means to be different, to be contemporary, to break away and to find an alternative, it is not necessarily an end in itself. There is a sculpture on one of the terraces, a female torso in wood which appeals but on which is fixed a beaten copper head which to my eye and sensibility is without harmony or feeling between the materials. It becomes tawdry and twee... perhaps I am prejudiced and reminded too much of the copper souvenirs of a decade or two ago. But mixed media is a potential direction for those who experiment and work long enough to mix the materials well; if it is used in the search for something different. It seems that here, amongst the participants of this workshop, the collective in Africa is dissipating in the search for the individualistic.

Wood was the traditional medium, and then came stone with the so-called Shona sculpture, a contemporary movement commencing in the late 50s on which the emphasis, both at home and abroad, has been for 35 years, and which has become synonymous with Zimbabwean art. Here clearly, the revolution against that continues and the break-away mood is to mix media. Locally, Naso Callinicos, now in Australia, and Richard Jack were the first to experiment and work in this manner.

Tapfuma Gutsa told me in 1981: "I am not a Shona Sculptor. I don't believe in all that hocus pocus. I want to be a sculptor. I want to go and study overseas. I want to be myself." Aided by a British Council grant, he went to London and studied for three years at the Guild School where he was exposed to multi-media. He has since that time been steadily finding himself and proving to be the centre of the alternative. He is strong, outspoken, audacious, passionate, highly imaginative and creative.

Late in the afternoon at the motel, after lunch of bream, sadza and relish, sitting under a fir tree where the weavers are building noisily, Tapfuma joins us and, while swigging beer from the bottle, begins to talk in his characteristic staccato manner about the workshop, the politics:

"The idea of the workshop was problematical from the beginning. I reacted against the Pachipamwe workshops of the past where the sculptors were underprivileged compared to the painters. The painters got materials worth hundreds of US dollars and the sculptors, about five hundred Zim dollars worth of stone. That wasn't good enough. But here, by giving enough materials, there has been a lot of experimentation and the

spirit of the workshop has been good. Calm. And if, when it all comes out, it is not good enough then we have failed. We've been trying to get out of the usual mould, to break-away, and it's about honesty in the process. It's a sharing of ideas and it makes one work hard."

"And Tapfuma, what about the politics? The infamous meeting at the Kentucky Hotel at the beginning of the year?"

He laughs. "Yeah, yeah, all of that." He laughs again. "I decided to call a meeting and announce my intentions about the workshop. I had been funded by the Delfina Trust (London). There was opposition to the control of the funds. It was like I was trying to upstage everybody. There was a fight about the money and the control. It ended in a fight. Then I didn't know what to do and nearly abandoned the idea. I came to you and you said, you will lose reputation and credibility if you don't do it... if you have the money, make a plan, fix a location and date and send out invitations and put the onus on them to come and take a chance and have a good time or bad, or not to come and lose out or not. So I did that... the older artists promised to give stone but they didn't. They didn't come even although they were invited out of courtesy... and the traditional Pachipamwe donors gave nothing... I think they had bad vibes." He drinks off some beer from the bottle. "But there are 25 artists, from here, Namibia, Zambia, Mozambique, England, Jamaica and one or two from Germany."

Then the talk moves to the work that is being done. "What about the ideas behind the work, Tapfuma? Are the artists talking about their ideas? Or is it just things put together?"

"Intellectually we are not armed. A lot of us haven't had art education. Stamps (Minister of Health) talks about Health for All by the Year 2000. I talk about Art Education for All by the Year 2000. The problem is that our education system has no art involvement. Art must be taken to the schools. Even if there is one artist in a thousand, that one should be given the chance. We are children of chance. Our government only wants to take people overseas for technical training."

"But you've got that education, Tapfuma. Did you angle the workshop towards discussion and ask what artists are putting down?"

"You know what it was... everybody thought that we were out to make a coup. No, it wasn't that. Just wanted to make one learn from the others."

"But you want to get the artists away from the Shona sculpture movement?"

"Yes, because it's a dying movement. I think that with John (Takawira) and Ndandarika and other people, the movement went. The problem is that Shona sculpture is related to Eskimo art... it's an anthropological interest. And people can sell. People work with a gallery and people are encouraged to make spiritual references. Somebody I know, a close friend, making sculpture... he has a house with solar power and water piped from the well. It's about the economic situation. So now the whole village is making sculptures. Like Tengenenge... buy one there and you can find as good on the roadside. It's an eyesore. I have run far to come here. If people want me to run further I will fight." He laughs.

Tapfuma Gutsa



Barbara Murray

Tapfuma Gutsa



Barbara Murray

Among his contributions during the three week run of the workshop, aside from the organisational aspects, is a worked block of rough textured stone turning off its vertical axis, on to which is fitted a metal pipe and a branch with a trumpet-like loud hailer or hearing aid.

Another of Tapfuma's works in progress is a suitcase-sized shape of compacted wire, straight from the metal salvage yard, to which he has fixed blocks of wood, reminiscent of a transistor radio, the wires of which are teased upwards to form an aerial. Another is a rectangular metal frame about seven foot long on the sides of which are welded the rudimentary stretchers used in the mines, a six foot long sheet iron plate with handles, and on top of the frame another stretcher with the wrapped form of a corpse. More an installation piece this... of the mine cage and mine accident.



Keston Beaton

It seems he has gathered his kind to himself... "I am a leader through my work but I should not be seen as the centre."

"No, we don't see Tapfuma as the leader of a movement," says Frances. "We are not his disciples."

"But inevitably you are seen as a leader, Tapfuma," we say. There is no further protest.

At the end of the day, about five miles along the Gweru road, we turn towards Surprise Siding. Why Surprise? Nobody seems to know the reason. Berry Bickle volunteers that there is a 'shebeen' located there... the present day surprise at Surprise? We turn onto a farm and stop at a dilapidated barn to visit the painters and metal workers.



Here Keston Beaton has, from found objects, assembled a mosquito-like insect with its own inbuilt cylinder barrel from a small engine. Another of his efforts is a wooden head around which he has wrapped a metal mask which has more potential. His guitar, in simple line and form, works well. He says he has been up and down the back streets of Shurugwe looking for interesting scrap and found objects.

outside wall of the barn; white ground on which she experiments with calligraphy and which she calls *Tears and Tears*, meaning both to cry and to rent, and on which are stuck bone-like scrolls of paper and wood. Inside the barn are her treasure trove suitcases and trunks. There too, on the wall behind, are Shikani's icon-like paintings in ochres and reds. Gone are the suffering masses, at last. Outside in the yard, a Gutsa sculpture, in wood hewn from a tree trunk, of a nude male torso which is strong and good. No embarrassment here in depicting the genitals and slivers of wood have been teased to depict pubic hair.

En route to Harare by night, the questions arise, are answered in part, dispelled, rise again. Does the workshop work? That it is apparently well organised and efficient...

yes. That it has satisfied the artists... yes. For most of them it is a period of time out of their normal working environment and struggle for existence, where for three weeks there is a bed, food, drink, succour without worry and the opportunity to be with like souls in the struggle; to gain strength, encouragement and stimulation in the artistic quest. But

Berry Bickle

workshops do not suit all. There are those solitaries in the quest who must work alone. And, while workshops afford benefit, solace, impetus, it is a half measure. An art school is necessary for Zimbabwe. Surely only the best is enough for Africa's artists of the future.

What is the effect of this workshop? The concentration of a new contemporary movement and different directions? or the dissipation of a cultural mishmash that will be repeated as far afield as Namibia? We

wrestle to answer this. Internationalism? Continental drift? Can the resulting work be seen to be 'African' or does this not matter? "Yes it is African," Berry Bickle had said. "When I was working at the Delfina Studios, up against the products of the British art schools already well set in their trends, they were positively boring. These people are much more exciting." "They are Africans and if they are honest their work will inevitably be African," Barbara had said.

To me the message of the workshop seems clear: Africa is changing. Zimbabwean sculpture and art are undergoing a change. This is not a new phenomenon. It has been going on largely unnoticed for a decade or more, around a few catalysts... of which Tapfuma Gutsa is one.

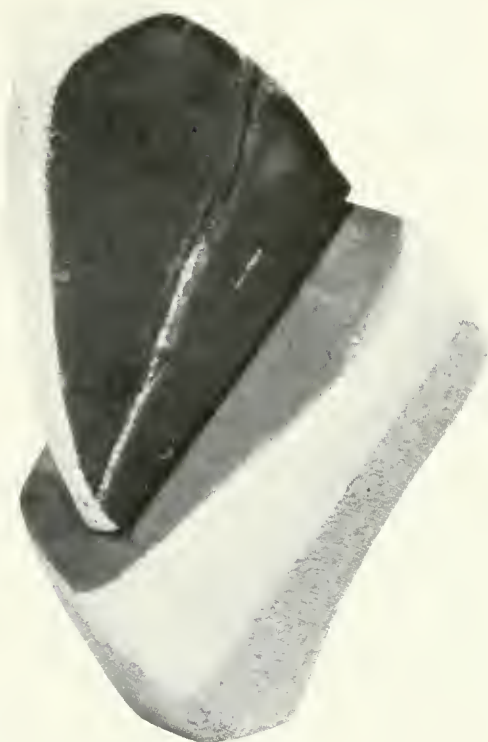
The message that needs to go out to the art community, its observers, interested parties, organisations and collectors, here and abroad, is that the revolt against the established in Zimbabwean art — Shona sculpture — is in progress and that this revolt is black African inspired and motivated; that it comes from within.

The workshop itself was African inspired and organised and comprised predominantly sculptors with a few painters, predominantly black with a few whites. 'African' art or Art in Africa? That is the question.

It is time for the West to review its attitudes: to move on from the preconceived idea of Africa as still the 'dark' continent, wild, exotic, primitive; its art still primitive, traditional, only ethnic, with little relevance to contemporary modernist developments. The change is evident in this workshop. It will have great difficulty surviving against the popular, commercial and fashionable, in which so many operatives have their interests. But change is here.

On the way home it rains. The dry season is ending.

Nicholas Mukomberanwa,
Landslide, 50cm x 75cm,
springstone



Snijder-Gedling

Inheritors may
simply preserve their legacy,
throw it in the dustbin,
or use it in some constructive way

Questions of inheritance

The Zimbabwe Heritage Exhibition at the National Gallery is the major art event of the year, an indicator of the health or otherwise of our art scene. One thing the Heritage Exhibition does do is generate a storm of contention, criticism and opinion on the state of art in Zimbabwe. Below is a selection of comments from many different people expressing their individual response to this year's exhibition.

"Painting should blow people's minds. You should always be excited about it. During the selection I found that I did respond to certain pieces like that, and I had then to sit back and think about it and try and dig deep into my thought and the things I've seen and the things I think are important in terms of perception and philosophy... and say to the others this is why this sculpture or painting is so very important... to open new vistas. People who like art will find that a painting is an important happening to them... and that is what we were looking for here. I want to feel something happening."

"People say that there were 3000 pieces but you only chose 220... it's like they think we were waiting with machetes! It doesn't work like that. We chose work for people to look at."

"Eurocentrism is the driving force behind most art production in Zimbabwe today. Because of overseas and local dealers who export huge numbers of mediocre works and the increase in tourism, many artists produce only to sell and we get copying and mass-production. As selectors we spoke of the need for artists to investigate mythology, inner feelings, spiritual beliefs, social concerns in order to create from within themselves rather than for external, commercial reasons."

"Each single piece was examined on its own merit, an enormous task, and many pieces were revisited many times. We tried as a panel to look for common elements in groupings of works after we had winnowed out many pieces. Having discussed and examined these common elements at length, we

eventually selected what we considered to be the best exemplars."

"As selectors we adopted a 'lean and mean' approach, focussing on the calibre of the work and rejecting large quantities of batiks and second-rate stone work. To be accepted must be seen as an honour to aspire to, something that transcends prize money or the assurance of going into someone's collection or attracting better prices."

"The judging was very fair. The local judges are people who understand better what is happening in Zimbabwean culture."

"I thought the exhibition was much better than previous years, much better than last year, even the catalogue. The standard of the pieces last year was much lower, painting and sculpture. They did a good job of the selection."

"I do not doubt for a minute that the selectors did all they could with the work submitted to them and as far as I can gather the general consensus is that this year's Annual is the best one we have had for some years. Most of the work is up to 'standard'. No risks taken; no offence given; nothing that will set your teeth on edge. But why should artists be expected to take risks? After all, not only is the Annual the most prestigious event of the year but awards and monies are involved! So there you are - another year, another show. How many of these works will you remember five years from now? Time is the ultimate selector."

"Our culture is full of contradictions and variety and the art reflects this... all the different points of view and different ways of looking at things."

"It's like a church bazaar... something for everyone."

"Good things are squeezed in between a lot of bad stuff."

"The exhibition is good because this year I can see different works. It's not the same as before. If you go round, put your eyes on it, you can't see Mother and child, Mother and child, Spirit of this, Spirit of that. You see different titles. Last year things were too much but this year the exhibition is perfect. I think the judges did a very good job."

"I think the exhibition this year is good. Before when artists worked together they were copying... so now if you look at the sculptures here they are all different. It was nice to call the Zimbabwean judges because the jurists from outside the country didn't know what was going on. This year they took the outside selectors into the shop and they could see what was there and then they would say we have seen what is there and there is plenty of such type of pieces, so they only put on what was different."

"I enjoyed the way the artists received their prizes. It was good. It was fun. I thought this is a special place here not like anywhere else. And the way Rashid hugged the President."

"I wanted to hug him three times but I was worried about the security guard. I asked him very politely. I said Sir, can I embrace you?"

"It was good to hear the President speak of universal things and no racism after all the rubbish of the last few weeks. I hope he's going to stick to that and not go back. It was nice when he spoke from his heart, when he said that he liked art because it helped him get away from all the political worries, before he started on the set speech that had been written by someone else with all the verbose sentences and generalised eulogy."

"I was impressed with Professor Kahari's speech. It was not just the general platitudes. I respect his point of view, its very open. You would have expected him to be more nationalistic but it was quite balanced."

"I was pretty impressed with the sculpture. After the Zimsculpture workshop... I'm so much more aware of sculpture now. Exhibitions produced after workshops are much more exciting. Although some pieces are unfinished, the end result is much more exciting."

"The development in sculpture seems to be heading more and more in the direction of craftwork."

"Usually on the Heritage, there is a lot of stone sculpture with no particular originality. Usually it's packed with a lot of ugly stone sculpture and this time it's really well done. There was a lot of different media. For once the stone is not the prominent material."

"The sculpture that was selected was genuine. Influences we accepted but anything copied or with similarity to the formulated, stylised work in the shop was out. The new generation are trying to break away and it was disappointing not to see work by some of the innovative younger artists such as Keston Beaton and Crispin Matakenya."

"Richard Jack (The Table's Tale) uses the pictorial plain and works on the contrasts of the materials, the rough and the worked, the stone and the different woods. The mirror-like finish is effective with its use of reflections."

"Landslide by Nicholas Mukomberanwa convincingly demonstrates that it is not decorative incision, but the logic of the cut which matters to stone sculpture. A thoughtful distribution of planes re-articulates the mass of stone and reveals a truly marvellous exposure of a fault line in the 'head' — which both suggests and withholds an image of face or bird beak, and which, from one angle completes the profile of a 'shoulder' behind. If Mukomberanwa has risen to the challenge of simplifying his work, he hasn't gone far enough. The smooth trench of the neck — less a saw cut than a demonstration that the two pieces have not been glued together — and the carefully chiselled edges — which mute the shape of the rock — are still too 'finished'. Despite and because of his mastery, Mukomberanwa articulates a dilemma faced by most stone carvers in Zimbabwe: the desire to sell is amplified by fear, fear of letting a rock be what it is, before it is made to represent something else, stylised and finished as art."

Thomas Mukarombwa's approach and method could not be more different, breathing life into stone by gentle subtraction and sensitive modulation of surfaces, allowing bodies to emerge through the skin of stone. Mukarombwa remains a compassionate observer, a dreamer, evoking the pathos of beings struggling towards consciousness in a world beyond comprehension or control of will.

Arthur Azevedo is the undisputed master of a now well-established genre. In both Cow and Crow, he assembles and welds his steel fragments like brushstrokes, with the same apparent ease and naturalism of his pen and ink drawings. Yet his convincing demonstration of skill leaves little further to the imagination.

As distinct from the recycling of scrap, Adam Madebe (Quartet) stages an expensive transformation of virginal stainless steel into an awkward grouping of exhaust mufflers, profited no doubt by allusion to church choir and organ pipes. However the addition of open-mouthed cartoon faces is too much to bear — and despite their vocal effort, completes a monumental ensemble which is both pompous and inert.

The liveliest interest in the sculpture section is the scrap metal work. Harry Mutasa's Graduate Acrobat and Elephant in Quicksand (see Contents page) with its exhaust pipe trunk, are star performers. With concise and inventive use of steel scrap, Martin Mushonga convincingly dissimulates the character of a Chameleon. Tapiwa Chapo's Pub Dancer awkwardly gesticulates like an ostrich at a urinal. Its humour shames the elegant crafted piece by Stanford Derere whose work has become almost too smooth and collectable.

Zimbabwe's ostrich industry may be in crisis but ostrich breeding is doing a little too well in the art world! As soon as a rock becomes a bird, a whole flock of look-alikes appears. Much of the welded metal on show threatens to follow stone in another version of the flying-ducks-above-the-mantelpiece syndrome, an industry with little qualitative claim to art."



Simon Back, Herder II,
1994, 180cm x 180cm,
mixed media

"Haven't I seen that one before?"

"Painting in Zimbabwe has a long local tradition of unchallenging pleasantness. Loose gestural brushmarks, muted colour and surface texture veil the inanity of subject matter without content. There is a creeping fashionable tide for painting figures without faces. After all it is much easier to paint a back view than it is to tackle the complexities of the human face."

(Helen Lieros, Alphabet) "This is an example of collage really working. The various pieces of paper are juxtaposed to create a sense of depth and distance. There is energy and subtlety in the pen strokes which together with a limited range of colour, the artist uses to evoke light and shadow and to express a strong sense of mood."

(Simon Back, Herder II) "The artist evokes man in the landscape, as part of the land. He presents the viewer with ambiguity as the figure turns into the landscape and landscape into figure, the head becomes the mountain, and the cattle walk across his chest and arms, close to his heart. The blue ties it all together. His line, his brushstroke is free and full of energy. The size of the canvas itself indicates his

confidence in his ability to paint, to communicate his vision, and his commitment to art."

"Simon Back, (Herder I) a mature young artist portrays discrete canvas surfaces; as if shadows could leave stams. The whitened colour areas of the background make light palpable. Like closely observed weather, the strong forms invite introspection. The horizontal broken rhythm of the band flowing from the animal's horns towards the standing figure, incorporated by the yellow/blue sunlit infusion of the cloud, flourishes and orchestrates this strikingly simplified composition. A sense of majestic, other-worldliness is implied in the painting's bold aperture that floats amid white space. Both Herder I and II bear marks of earlier paintings: they still contain the agitation and gesture within the format."

(Rashid Jogee, Lal Mhe Ree) "Now there was a cat called Al Halaj, a 13th century Sufi poet, and his nickname was The Red Falcon. He professed that he had some contact with Allah and he started to rave about him in the market place, called himself a friend of Allah, and he wrote lots of religious poetry. His poetry is very awe inspiring. And then he was in his own quarters, praying, and the crowd got angry and decided to executed him. And he was praying and praying and the crowd

came closer and closer and they cut off his head, and the head went tumbling down and it was still praying. And they made him a martyr. Then I came across some Indian music, songs about The Red Falcon, and I thought, Hey I must do a painting to this music. The music is fantastic. "

(Thakor Patel, Dambudzo Marechera) "A new departure for Thakor, using words. It's interesting, so much art overseas uses text as part of the conception, good to see someone here using it. The design is good and the idea is interesting. It's a very crafted texture, but then the danger of what happens when you put the brush stroke on top and then making the next brush stroke fit in. "

(Tackson Muvezwa, Apollo II) "The painting is anonymous. The artist's autodidact manner, spontaneous brushstrokes and possible irregularity of composition do not distract. Unlike many other works on this exhibition where social scenes of everyday life prevail, this work poses a myth. On the surface it illustrates a little more than what the title says. Has Apollo broken his nose? Does he fly in the heaven surrounded by birds from Africa? Is this Apollo a white man's god or spirit? This painting cannot be explained by its title or interpreted in any simple way. It provokes the imagination. Like L'art brut, this work portrays an eidetic image. It forces the spectator to look, to communicate a feeling and discern the meaning of this myth."

"Two paintings, for me, each in a very different style from the other, have more to offer than most of the paintings on the exhibition. They joyously indulge in self-sufficient colour and they are about life and its pleasures. The bar-room green, jazz pink, and electric yellow in Marvellous Mangena's Inspiration from a Bass Player, sing the fifties music of the sax, piano and drums, while sharp-edged plastic pink, purple and acidic blue thump a mind-numbing nineties beat in George Churu's Party Celebration. Although Mangena's style is heightened realism and Churu's is flattened abstraction, both paintings are well-crafted. What a relief it is to discover them among the blacks, browns, greys, designer smudges, wild scumbles, deathly drips and bathos of the more fashionable pseudo-angst. "

(George Churu, Party Celebration) "Of the young black painters, he is one who has broken away from the naturalistic, using semi abstract forms enlivened by symbols of contemporary daily life, numbers, adverts, modern textiles, to do with urban life now, more interesting than the traditional scenes, village scenes, market scenes which could almost be any century. Perhaps he is pointing in a new direction?"

"I've got a soft spot for Thomas Mu's work. Sit Down and Feel works well except for the large figure. It would be more effective with just the tree and the small figure. I think they're sort of wonderful but they are not quite successful as painting yet. It's like they're the beginnings of a potentially marvellous painting."

(Shephard Mahufe, Music with Drama) "It's wonderful. God what potential. He's really working, trying out new stuff. "

"I am very ambivalent about the realistic painting... there is nothing of the artist in it. Another realistic artist could paint exactly the same painting. I am looking for the artist's own unique vision of the scene not a reproduction."



Tackson Muvezwa,
Apollo II,
1994, 90cm x 178cm, oil



George Churu,
Party Celebration,
1994, 104cm x 66cm, oil

Art issues

"Art is a sensor and a possibility to irritate, to disturb, to make people think about the social scene and to understand themselves. Art could raise its voice more loudly than we see here. Mugabe said he liked art because it helped him to forget the political worries. Is that what art is for... to make politicians feel happy?"

"Much of the art here is on too simple a level. There is no deep thought about the subject. For example, the painting of the street kids... that's all it is... just some little children... even with smiling faces. There is no honest thought about the complexity of their situation or the reality of their lives... no emotion is expressed... just a pretty picture. It's too simple."

"There is so much potential, raw talent and commitment... but it needs discipline, questioning, criticism, education. The need for an art school with tough teachers is now becoming desperate. These young artists must learn to assess their work, to take criticism. Not all the time praise and awards for work that is mediocre and could be pushed much further."

"The artists have a role to play. They should support the Zim Heritage. Maybe Zim Heritage needs a shake up. We need statements, continuity. Not just one piece and it's finished and start another. Artists need to think about art, the wider issues, not just the single piece."

"This exhibition is to protect and develop Zimbabwe's art heritage; to identify, encourage and develop those artists who can go on and develop even further."

"It is very important that art is exposed, criticised, discussed. It is crucial to our growth."

Other sections

"Despite the problems which confront us in this third world country (materials, presses etc) the artists in the graphics section have produced works of interest, translating their themes into fascinating images and subjects of importance to human beings. Although the work is generally small in scale, and regardless of whether the sadza spoon or the rolling pin was used in the process, the exploration of media was exciting. In many instances the meanings of symbolism, hidden in mythology and culture, come to the surface. The artist discovers, like the archeologist, a historical inheritance and translates it into a modern idiom."

"The ceramics section is very sad... where are our potters? It's the one medium which should be flooded with entries. It is the oldest art form in Zimbabwe, so easy to get clay and so flexible for expression but no one is doing anything exciting. We need some big ceramics, some experimental work, not just the same old conventional forms."

"The textiles are very disappointing... think of the wealth of African textiles but this has no colour, form, texture... no excitement."

The catalogue is not as bad as the last two years but there is still too much on the President, the Minister, the Director, the sponsors, the staff of the gallery etc. This is not the annual report. The exhibition and the catalogue are about the art. The art should come first with only a small space for the other stuff. And they could do with a good designer for the catalogue."

"As a collector, I was really disappointed because you had to pay the full amount if you wanted to buy a piece on the day, you couldn't even put a deposit. You couldn't put a red sticker and come back later. I wanted to buy a painting and I didn't have enough. I said I could pay half and they said no you must pay all now. I was very upset. This is too much, it's a very big discrimination."

"The problem is that the artists want us to pay them immediately. We pay the artists the first week of the month. So we ask you to pay in full amount so that we can pay the artists. Some purchasers in the past didn't come to pay up after eight months or a year. So how can we pay the artists? The day of the opening there is no reserve. After the opening you can reserve for up to 24 hours."

"Some work is badly hung. Look at the way this is displayed... the light fitting above and the light switch cutting the frame and the sculpture right in front of it so you can't see it alone. And so much of the sculpture jammed against the wall so you can't see it from all sides. And the sculpture on the floor is placed in such a boring way, plonk, plonk."

"Is it necessary to have the Heritage every year? Why not have it every four years so that there is a more dynamic selection. Or if there are only a few good things, have it much smaller."

"The Gallery should go back to calling it the Annual. Get rid of all the hype and pomp. It should just be the best of the year. Let history and the future decide what is worth taking note of and learning from... though maybe by looking at a lot of this work young artists can see what not to do, what to fight against!"

"Does the award system encourage young artists to be more innovative, or does it reinforce emulation, leading to stale, stylised imitation of previous award winners?"

"The Gallery has got to change its image. Zim Heritage has got to encourage and attract artists, to persuade them to enter only their best, to keep their best for Zim Heritage. The gallery has become a bit tired and there is very little for serious artists, if they go there, they don't find anything of excitement. For many artists if they haven't exhibited there it doesn't matter to them. In the past the artists have been alienated from the Gallery, things have got to change. When you talk about what could have been done, you have to ask yourself if you have contributed as much as you can."

"The system of invited artists is suspect... if you are an artist... what criteria is used... if you are not invited... why should you enter if your work is of top calibre? Who is not invited? Who is the selected artist? Artists don't understand what the process is."

"The Heritage has a terminal illness brought about by too much hype about too little real commitment to art. Prize money, when it is spread so thinly over such a large field of prizewinners effectively negates its incentive; and highly commended certificates are, frankly, patronising."

"Winning a prize has no effect on my work but I was very, very happy. Next year I'm going to do better than that."



Marvellous Mangena,
*Inspiration from a
Bass Player, 1994,*
88cm x 50cm, enamel

Michiel Dolk,
a Dutch/Australian artist
recently exhibited
installation work,
Marbles — Lost for life,
at Gallery Delta.
In this interview with
Barbara Murray,
Michiel talks about
some of the concepts
that inform his work.

Michiel Dolk, *Lecterns*, 1994, wood and marble



Beyond the

BM: Installation art is not something we see much of in Zimbabwe. Can you define installation art?

MD: It is difficult to generalise and impossible to define installation in terms of any essential combination of elements because it is an open-ended series of relationships and media. So you can't say installation is this or is not this, because it's a series of working parameters which often extend between and across different art forms. Generally it seeks to break down the idea of art as a discrete and self-sufficient object, by making one aware of the space and context which objects inhabit. The idea of a perambulatory space is often important in installation work; the idea of the mobilisation of the viewer through the space, and of how you can intervene in an architectural space to create a new awareness, sometimes a self-conscious awareness, of your own relationship to space.

BM: How would you specifically relate these concerns to your recent exhibition?

MD: My work for the Delta exhibition was different from my usual site-specific approach in which the work only exists for the duration of the exhibition and is therefore not saleable or transferable to a different space or context. Even though this work wasn't really generated within the space, I did conceive the work in terms of how I remembered the space and context of Gallery Delta. What is very important to me is how the objects relate to the architectural frame. What became important with the *Lecterns* piece was, since the gallery is very axial, to use that axis and at the same time empty the whole space around it, so that the viewer is encouraged to walk round and explore different aspects of the particular sequence. As an indivisible sequence of five objects, *Lecterns* displaces attention from the singular object in terms of the multiple. And the multiple relates through sequence to seriality or repetition, which are both architectural and industrial in character. So the work was conceived both in terms of the exhibition space and the whole process of its production, that is, the factory system. The formal, technical possibilities of what I could do with the marble were very much constrained by the nature of the industrial production process.

BM: Is the industrial process an important part of the form that the work takes?

MD: Absolutely, and that presumes, not just a distancing from manual expression in terms of one's relationship to material, that trace of the hand, but also a distancing in terms of a division of labour between the conception or design and the process of its production, which is in turn subject to a further division of labour. In this particular work I was involved throughout the whole process of production. After selecting, framing and editing the material, this was just a matter of supervision, ensuring quality control.

BM: Is this the first work that you haven't physically been the producer of?

MD: No, not at all. In a funny way I have been more directly involved in the production of this work than with my other work. These are very much "assisted readymades", to use Duchamp's terminology, not actual readymades, in that I didn't simply come across these objects readymade. In many other works I have simply worked with objects purchased off the supermarket shelves. In this case I had to choose the particular marble, the format, the cutting... even though the tombstone format is still known to the stonemasons, the books went out of production some time ago... uneconomic ...even as art-objects! But both the choice of material and factory production method were as much determined by the fact that I don't have a studio or tools in Maputo.

BM: Is that separation between the conceiver and the maker important?

MD: Well, the question is also, *who* is the maker? Is the maker the designer? or the one who wields the cutting saw? Or, for that matter, is it nature? It comes back to this notion of the readymade. With these assisted readymades, even though I'm taking a generic type like a tombstone, I am involved in the redesign of that type, and in the selection of the kind of marble for the making of that object, as a kind of designer, which is different from a purely conceptual removal from even the design or look of the object.

BM: Can the artist remove himself from the design of the work?

MD: Well yes through the readymade, where, for instance, you literally purchase the object off the shelf — a chance encounter, or as Duchamp would have called it a "rendez-vous" between the artist and object, where the object is a readymade configuration, which simply in terms of its placement, through the context of its presentation, its re - presentation, may acquire the status of art. But I suppose the problem today is that the readymade has been swallowed by the whole post-modern game of consumption, with the artist as glorified shopper. I hope the marbles have a different character even if derived from the readymade in two distinct ways: on the one hand, the readymade character of the image as produced by nature — a substitute for painting — and, on the other hand, the readymade character of the object form derived from the tombstone, book and lectern.

BM: Are you trying to create a particular kind of response?

MD: I'm not trying to provoke any particular viewer response. Viewers determine their own responses to objects, but you can manipulate, you can do certain things which differ from other things

frame?

within a given context. Absence is as significant as presence. If the gallery's got no paintings on the wall it makes people relate to the space in a different way. In this case the objects are neither conventional paintings nor sculptures, neither books nor tombstones. There are all kinds of permutations you can play with to change perceptions of what's going on, to create a kind of uncertainty about what it is you're looking at, so that you can see it in a new way.

BM: Why did you place the one piece, *Postscript*, on the floor?

like computer command lingo, the new bible, "Escape Clear Window Save" etc.

BM: Are you not drawn to eternal truths?

MD: If there are eternal truths, they are particular momentary revelations, they're sort of evanescent, they're glimpses. I must say I was drawn to marble and its memorial character, its rhetoric of permanence. When you look at the grain in the marble it's just like



Steffen Gredling

MD: Having the piece on the floor emphasises the tombstone quality, but what motivated my decision to leave that piece on the floor was that the seven books all derive from one slab of marble with a particular diagonal grain within it which suggested a kind of aerial view... perhaps a stretch of coastline. So the position of the viewer in looking down on the work became important. The diagonal character of the grain naturally relates to the idea of a corner and a diagonal position on the floor. In sequence the grain also relates to the whole idea of reading from left to right, which unlike text is of course reversible. Instead of turning the page, you go from one book to the next. So that determines how the viewer is led through the work.

BM: Three of the pieces are frontal, even the *Lecterns* you don't really walk behind.

MD: Yes, in fact the rear of the *Lecterns* is only visible if they are elevated. The rear of that piece is to me a very compelling vantage point because of the grain which, like an enlarged black and white photograph, is almost an unacknowledged book cover. I thought of having the rear on view as you entered the gallery so you had to walk round. But I decided in the end to stick with the front of the books, so that you're walking in as a reader rather than as someone being read to.

BM: In your introduction you suggest the reader imagines his own inscription or text in the books. Why are there no words?

MD: Inscriptions are overcome by the weight of marble. When fixed rather than imagined or spoken, words become heavy as if loaded with universal and immutable significance. "In memory of..." - and in the titles of course I did fall into "homage to so and so" - it's so funereal and I wanted to avoid the obvious tombstone register... or for that matter, the biblical. I hate the portentous aura of eternal truths. The only register of words I think could work is electronic

the way a Chinese calligrapher tries to conjure up a cloud. That to me is much more interesting than this heavy inscription... "In the beginning... the Word..."

BM: Where does the marble come from?

MD: Well it's Mozambican marble, mined in Montepuez near Pemba in Cabo Delgado. That's why I called one of the pieces *Cabo Delgado*, partly because that grey sequence in the white frame very strongly suggested a rocky seascape, and since I'd recently visited Cabo Delgado itself, the northernmost point of Mozambique which has a lighthouse with the sea crashing on the rocks below, it seemed to be a suitable title referring both to the location of the material and also to the landscape of that area. What I like about the quality of the marble is the extent to which it is like nature representing itself, an illusion of itself. You know there's this specious argument, yet interesting, that the origin of art, of mimesis, is to be found in nature; camouflage for instance, the chameleon, or even the lyre-bird imitating the call of other species. It's not a theological argument, but then neither is it Darwinist.

BM: You bring a lot of deliberate thought and allusions to your work. What other references are there in these works? Are there any related to Africa in particular?

MD: Whether intentional or not, references are a matter of interpretation, potentially endless. These pieces are not African in character or at least they do not relate to any particular African tradition of design, but they do exploit the ambiguity found in African cultural traditions between art, function and ritual, in relation to burial for instance, referring to that indivisibility of the aesthetic, sacred and profane. Another point of reference is a classical tradition, not just in the choice of material, but formally, in the logic of repetition, sequence and order. But the question of the exposure of the grain relates more to Japanese aesthetics, for instance, that beauty lies in

**Below: Michiel Dolk,
Cabo Delgado,
1994, marble**

the presentation of the truth of the grain, and in that sense, the work relates to a kind of Japanese garden architecture, to a contemplative ordering of nature. If you look at Chinese or Japanese calligraphic painting, the way the image is composed... with an active, interaction of air, water... rocks wrapped in clouds. You can almost imagine that's how the stone came to be formed. There's something in this flow, and in the sense that the liquid material is, in the permanency of the marble, stopped, already frozen as image and gesture. Simply revealing the stone becomes an ironic comment, a critique of painting.

BM: What do you mean it's a critique of painting?

MD: All my installation work is a continual interrogation of the problems of making a painting. But it's never a painting. It's about the impossibility of painting. I mean, why make a painting after all? For me the very idea of now making a gesture, or anything embodying my own gesture, with paint, on a piece of canvas, is a total impossibility.

BM: So you take what you find and use that.

MD: Well it's like I find gestures elsewhere. For instance, I did a whole series of pieces based on fragments of tyres. You know when tyres become unthreaded, you see the pieces lying on the road. Some of them are incredibly gestural. The force that tears them apart is gestural. I collected a whole pile of them when I used to travel between Sydney and Canberra and then did this gigantic

MD: Some of them looked reptilian, but they resolved themselves as both landscapes and figures. By shoving them onto the wall you do end up with an ironic form of landscape painting, in the same way as these marbles are. I wanted to show the marbles in Zimbabwe because there's this strong colonial tradition of landscape painting here, as well as the local tradition in stone. So it's like I'm doing something in stone which is a displacement from the idea of sculpture and I'm doing something with the image which is a displacement from the idea of landscape painting. I don't want to overdo the critical function of the marbles, but they cross both landscape painting and stone sculpture and perhaps question both because they're *not* paintings and they're *not* sculpture.

BM: What other sort of work have you done?

MD: There are continuous threads through my work, but I'm very inconsistent, on principle, because I need to re-invent continually what it is that I'm doing. So it's like avoiding the trap of a signature style as well. As soon as it becomes too apparent to me that something is *mine*, something belonging to me, then I need to deny it and do something which is not me. Art is a matter of being aware of possibilities in a given context... what is this space? who is looking at it? It's like you're trying to place yourself somewhere in a particular location, a particular culture, a particular environment, and you try and deal with that, and then what comes out of that interaction inevitably has you in it. But that's the last thing I think about rather than "oh here, you'll recognise me, I'm still the same" which unfortunately I probably am.



Steffen Gelling

mural where I literally used these tyre fragments as readymades, like brushstrokes, a bit like the grain in the marble. These brushstrokes weren't made by me, I just discovered and collected them and then by suspending or letting them fall in a certain way, used their expressiveness as a material surrogate for painting. It's incredibly strong, much more forceful than any gesture I could make.

BM: Did the tyre works also resolve themselves into landscape forms?

BM: In the introductory sentence of the catalogue you describe yourself as a "lapsed painter". Is this a primary identification?

MD: It's a sort of ironic self description which relates back to the fact that, directly or indirectly, a lot of my installation work is still derived from the problematics of painting and of the pictorial, and of the relationship of the pictorial to the architectural. Painting since the mid 19th century has been dogged by the logic of the industrial, the logic of industrial replication and repetition through primarily the advancement of photographic representation, and has foregrounded

the activity of painting itself, that is, of mark making, as its own domain of legitimate expression. But there were still many other problems, of the possibilities of art, of the conditions of the pictorial, or of the limits of painting and of representation, which can be addressed in forms and media other than painting... other than the smell of oil on canvas... however intoxicating.

BM: The word lapsed to me implies a return?

MD: Yeah well that's left there, sort of dangling. It's true, to some extent. To date it's been relatively impossible... well not impossible... What has interested me is the problematic of the frame. In terms of the logic of what can happen within the frame of painting, art seems to have historically exhausted itself as anything other than a craft, or therapeutic activity. I will never deny the pleasure of painting, nor its difficulty. But the possibility of innovation, or the possibility of generating new ideas or content through what happens within the frame, seems exhausted, irrecoverable. Of course, whether you're painting or not, art is, in a sense, playing in the ashes of history. But then there is that imagined possibility... outside the conventional frame of painting or sculpture... imagine taking that frame elsewhere. In that sense, when I talk about landscape painting, in the tyres for instance, it is about taking that frame with you, relocating it within and without you, and rather than making a painting, just finding these surrogates for painting, that re-problematise the question of what art is. Because you can't ask the question "what is art" through making a painting anymore. You have to look at the relationship and the historical character of other media. You shouldn't take painting as the natural, eternal, immemorial, universal, frame for the unfolding of something called art. If it's a question of image making, why can't art happen on computer screens? Why does it have to happen in a medium called painting?

BM: But can computer screens be beautiful? Can they move the viewer in the same way as a painting?

MD: However much you bang your mouse, computers don't have the immediate physical, tactile dimension. As information processors or mediators, they don't have that sort of immediacy. There is a certain materiality to painting as well, which has its own specificity and its own history of emotion and meaning, and I don't want to invalidate that. But it's for my love or respect for painting, that I'm looking for other boundaries. A lapsed painter does imply a potential return. So much of it is premised on a particular view of history, of what precisely has exhausted itself, and what has not exhausted itself. And you can be locked into a kind of historical determinism, the historical notion of the avant-garde and the end of painting. That sense of the end of painting has been continually posed since the end of the 19th century. But however much we've modernised since, that endless demand for and absurd privilege of painting continues.

BM: Probably earlier too. Were there not certain stages of every period of art where it seemed like everything had been done?

MD: Sure you get a certain cyclical process of renewal, not just cyclical but also of processes, of techniques, ways of imaging, envisioning, imagining. For nothing is as irreversible as the effect of the industrial and communication revolutions on what we might imagine culture to be. I know that since the 60s we've lost that heroic tradition of the avant-garde, and that adventurous sense of decisive breaks into the new. However much an irritant, the avant-garde was also complicit with the logic of modernisation and cultural commodification. But given this loss, where today is there space for the critical function of cultural practices? Only theory in

academia seems to maintain the fiction of critique. It's in this context that I call myself a lapsed painter, implying the possibility of semi-graceful resignation to the way things are. But whenever I think myself painting, I always think in terms of a domain which, other than the making of a good painting, doesn't pose any fundamental questions beyond that. It means accepting the given frame and working within that frame.

BM: When did you stop painting?

MD: Painting is something I've always adopted and rejected. But I suppose that even while rejecting, my obsession has always been painting. It's partly an academic obsession, the *history* of painting. And then the feeling of whether I could do something within that history or not. I've never been a painter in the sense of painters are *painters*. So I'm not a *born* painter. I wasn't sort of, you know, born with a brush-tail or paint in my veins... or to quote Duchamp "stupid as a painter". I can't even claim a signature for myself within painting... which I'm very pleased about. Ad Reinhardt once said that sculpture was something you bumped into when standing back from a painting. I suppose that in walking back, looking at and thinking about painting, I bumped into the object and stumbled into "installation".

BM: Is that part of your need to be inconsistent?

MD: I need to have different reference points within the media I'm working in. So I'm not a marble mason, and why should I be only a marble mason or only a painter... or a basket weaver or computer video artist, or whatever. There's that whole thing about media. You can learn certain skills and use them according to the ideas and sensations you're able to generate or realise through them. It's terrible if the social division of labour programs your life in advance... in a linear narrative with a beginning, middle and end... a bloody boring life! I know, even for the artist, it is a luxury to refuse the role of specialist... a threat to career prospects, security and retirement benefits. But for me, commitment to notions of estrangement and displacement are much more interesting... continually displacing yourself, re-inventing yourself, in terms of different situations, media and ideas... discovering your limits and whatever ruins of identity you call yourself.

Stephen Williams writes about culture and politics in Bulawayo

The dominant topographical feature of Bulawayo is flatness, its landscape monopolised by a horizon so low and heavens so vast and blue that the city is sometimes referred to as Skies. By the end of winter, when not a drop of rain has fallen for up to eight months, Matabeleland is parched, small, stunted thorn scrub standing black and leafless against a backdrop of dusty earth and still yellow grass.

The arid nature of Bulawayo is particularly striking in comparison to the verdant surrounds and tall trees of Harare. These trees in turn mirror the ever-increasing canyonisation of downtown Harare which seems to have new buildings being erected on every other block. Visitors from the provinces can be under no illusion that this is where the country's wealth and power are centred.

For political and other reasons, particularly since independence, Bulawayo has been left relatively undeveloped. The topographical symbolism alluded to above extends beyond the relative dearth of new buildings to encompass the stagnation of Bulawayo's once vibrant economic infrastructure and the highest unemployment figures in the country. The drying up of water resources which followed the epic 1992 drought threatened to turn Bulawayo into a ghost town.

As the country's second city, Bulawayo has historically always reacted against the hegemony of the capital. The development of Bulawayo as the centre of industrial expansion in the 40s and 50s brought about the formation of workers unions by men such as Masoja Ndlovu and Benjamin Burombo. The massive Railway Strike of 1945 and the General Strike of 1948 gave expression to the emergence of radical working class politics and signalled a new challenge to the colonial administration in Salisbury.

Bulawayo's high density western suburbs flow directly on from the city centre making the one city concept more of a reality than in Harare where townships were conceived by colonial planners more like bantustans and situated far away from white residential areas. Long before independence a community services network was established by the Bulawayo City Council in the former townships which remains the envy of other councils today. A tour of Pelendaba, Mpopoma, Makokoba and Mzilikazi confirms the pivotal role that culture commands in the eyes of the Council. Institutions such as the Mzilikazi Art and Craft Centre and Bulawayo Home Industries continue to play an invaluable social and cultural role three decades on, and more recent initiatives are also in evidence. Buhlaluse is an amalgam of two craft co-operatives formed with assistance from the Council. The 'Flame Girls' and 'Marigold' comprise 38 women who produce bead work items in traditional Ndebele and modern idioms in a venture which is not only culturally regenerative but also provides a living for co-operants.

Political struggle between ZAPU and ZANU during the early years of independence found cultural expression in 1985 with the controversy which surrounded Adam Madebe's welded metal sculpture *Looking to the Future*. Earlier that year a competition had been organised in Bulawayo to encourage local sculptors to produce public art to replace the colonial statues and monuments removed at independence but which had never been substituted with anything more in keeping with the new nation's ideology.

Madebe's imposing five metre nude male form won first prize in the competition but immediately sparked off a furore with battle lines drawn between traditionalist and modernist camps. Inevitably in those heady days, politics was never far from the surface and when the then Minister of Local Government intervened and ordered the sculpture removed, opinion quickly shifted with even the conservative traditionalists' camp coming to the defence of artistic freedom.

At one point during the ongoing tussle the sculpture's offending parts were

vandalised with spray paint which when cleaned up were conspicuously shiny in relation to the rest of the tall rusted figure. This development afforded an even greater sensation in the eyes of the crowds who came from afar to peer up at the infamous figure. *Looking to the Future* was eventually removed under cover of darkness by men from the Ministry of Public Works and confined to the store room of the old Bulawayo Art Gallery.

During those years of Gukurahundi, *Looking to the Future* came to symbolise the political struggle being waged between ZAPU and the ZANU dominated government in Harare. Never before or since in the life of this nation has a work of art caused such an uproar or been afforded such attention. People in Bulawayo began to question the essence of their culture and to consider issues such as the limits of artistic expression and freedom. Mischievously, at the height of the controversy, the late Head of the Bulawayo Art Gallery, Ms Margery Locke, placed Gillian Kaufman's life-sized, nude bronze sculpture of the Bulawayo born dancer Gary Burns on public view in the centre of the gallery. Word soon spread that there was another male nude just across the road from *Looking to the Future*. Attendance figures soared at the Bulawayo Art Gallery.

Happily in the new spirit of unity and glasnost *Looking to the Future* is once again on public display. The sculpture is the dominant feature in the courtyard of the new National Gallery Bulawayo, even if his view of the future is now somewhat symbolically distorted by his enforced gaze down the sanitary lane which divides the gallery from the Reserve Bank.

If a little bemused, Madebe is largely unaffected by the notoriety which accompanied the uproar. As a sign of the changed times, his status shifted from infamous to famous when the highest visual art accolade in the country, the Presidential Award of Honour, was conferred on him at the 1994 Zimbabwe Heritage Exhibition, for amongst other things, 'consistent excellence in the art world'.

For some time now, Madebe has been working independently of the Mzilikazi Art and Craft Centre where *Looking to the Future* was conceived and where Madebe worked as a sculpture instructor. Madebe has set up a studio in a warehouse near the Renkini bus terminal where his production centres around the human (although now mostly female) form. His beautifully contra postured figures are still constructed around a modelled clay armature but Madebe has moved away from the painstaking process of welding together the small stamped off-cuts that characterised his earlier work in favour of larger pieces of lighter sheet metal.

The new National Gallery Bulawayo is situated in the magnificently renovated Edwardian period building known as Douslin House. The purpose-built structure affords far more versatility and dignity to the displayed art work than was possible in the old gallery located in a former municipal market building. A major problem attached to the new gallery is that a lift designed to transport people in wheelchairs from the ground to upper floor was cut at the last minute by the head office in Harare. The shaft is there but not the lift. The upshot is that disabled people are only able to visit the downstairs gallery, approximately one third of the total gallery space. In a country where there are many disabled persons, such a funding cut is a genuine disgrace. The present Mayor of Bulawayo, the

outspoken Joshua Malinga, is a member of the Board of the National Gallery Bulawayo and is himself confined to a wheelchair. As such he is unable to tour in a dignified, unaided manner, an institution for which he is a trustee and which represents one of the brightest jewels in his city.

The previous Director of the National Gallery, the late Professor Cyril Rogers, demonstrated a real interest in Bulawayo and it was largely through his efforts that money was channelled into the renovation of Douslin House. It is sadly ironic that the two main movers behind the project, he and Margery Locke, never lived to see it officially opened. Marge died just days before the official opening in March 1994. Bulawayo waits to see what policies the new Executive Director in Harare, Professor George Kahari, will initiate and what this will mean for the National Gallery Bulawayo.

It was good to see this year's Pachipamwe International Artists' Workshop held in Shurugwe in September/October getting some coverage on ZTV news. The clip was, however, badly edited and must have made little sense to the average viewer. The subsequent news item about a tame gorilla in a shopping mall in the USA (courtesy CNN) received a much longer and more cohesive time slot. So much for promoting indigenisation. What sort of priorities do ZTV have anyway?

The Visual Artists' Association of Bulawayo (VAAB) continues to flourish and has recently launched a rejuvenated newsletter, *Ubuciko!* Today VAAB stands as the only artists' association in Zimbabwe and is run by artists for artists. Membership currently stands at 150 persons drawn from all parts of the country. VAAB may be contacted through the National Gallery Bulawayo or PO Box 2101, Bulawayo.



Adam Madebe
and friends,
c. 1994

Reviews of recent work



Stoffer Geiling



Adda Geiling, Richard Jack, Luis Meque, *Harare City Life*, 1994, oil on canvas

Commissions are never easy and the Goethe Institute added the constraints of size, shape and inter-relationship of colour when it asked three artists to create work for a specific site within their new offices. Using Gallery Delta as their base, the three artists met, discussed, painted, criticised, altered, until each individual artist's conception worked in relation to the whole. Now the three vertical canvases, set high up in the Institute's library provide a thought-provoking juxtaposition of cultures.

Adda Geiling, a painter from East Germany currently living in Zimbabwe, struggling to come to terms with the violation she experienced on her country's absorption by West Germany, has created a painting filled with European angst. Buildings and traffic swirl in a turmoil of speed and technology. Out of this maelstrom a single male figure rises through a shroud of red, his injured flesh exposed, his intense head shadowed. Above him, a dark, foreboding sky of deep ultramarine. The imaginary life of man in the city is portrayed through broad slashes and drips of paint which here convey anguish, haste, violence.

Harare City Life, The Goethe Institute, September 1994

The central panel by Richard Jack forms a complete contrast and reflects the white Zimbabwean preoccupation with nature. Through his harmonious use of the linking colours and his careful application of paint, the artist depicts his view: the city in Africa where the bush and the panacea of nature are never far away as opposed to Geiling's city in Europe from which man must struggle to escape. A tree spans Jack's divided canvas: on the left a jumble of material elements, geometric forms in bright colours, human heads, even a giraffe (Mukavisi woodlands is within the city); on the right, a ploughed field, abstracted green crop, a wide bottomed peaceful rock in an open stretch of earth receding to a naturalistic horizon with blue sky and sunlight. The paint here is smooth, controlled, calm. The city is seen in its material forms, more-or-less harmonised with nature, an optimistic viewpoint.

The third canvas by Luis Meque takes as its central motif social interaction - the human side of city life. Two large figures, talking together, dressed in cheerful if shabby clothes, dominate the scene. The buildings recede into the distance merely a backdrop for the people whose ordinary lives and conditions are the important consideration in this black African viewpoint. Human contact is stronger than the city's alienating forces. Drips and broad brush strokes are used by this artist to convey the poverty but humanness of street life.

The Goethe Institute, which aims to encourage cultural exchange, here presents us with three contrasting cultural views in these paintings, *Harare City Life*. As the Director of the Institute said in his unveiling speech, "Zimbabwe, torn between a tradition which is partly lost and modern western influence... has to find its own way." Discussion of the differences and points of contact between cultures must be radical and honest if we are to gain insight and understanding "from which a new cultural prospect can emerge". These three canvases make an interesting starting point. BM

**Steve Pratt, Sandro's Gallery,
October 1994**

Steve Pratt is not an artist who sits in his studio and thinks about Africa. Pratt is a farmer living close to the land and passionate about the bush. His painting is motivated by his fervour and his imagination.

Arching is a seductively quiet piece, a male torso, which through sensitive carving of the bone structure beneath the black serpentine skin creates a subtle play of light and shadow on the smooth surface. Both works reveal Jack's continuing preoccupation with youth and beauty in the human body. MM

a n d forthcoming exhibitions and events

His training was in Grahamstown where students were taught to learn from nature, to heighten their perceptions and trust their gut reactions. These influences show in Pratt's mature work despite his reputation as a rebel. He works both in acrylics and in oils.

There was a variety of work on display ranging from small but vibrant landscapes to large splattered, brooding canvases, notably his triptych of *Sinamatella* which captures the grey bush and the slow dry river which has carved its path into the sand.

In strong contrast were figure paintings of surrealist quality. For this observer it was the small simple landscapes that left a lasting impression. I was not sure about the 'messages' contained in some of the larger works, a very difficult thing to do. I wanted to remove his unexpected figures, poachers in camouflage in one instance, men chopping down trees in another. They were an irritant on an otherwise pristine land. Perversely, therein lies the strength of the message.

The surreal works were both entertaining and baffling. As someone who struggles with colour and tonal contrast, I was impressed by Pratt's control, variety and daring. The only thing I would wish for would be greater spontaneity in his application of paint. Loosen up! Wouldn't we all like to! PMB

**Richard Jack, Two directions with
three mediums, Gallery Delta,
October 1994**

The juxtaposition of stone, steel, wood, wool and reeds exposed in 22 sculptures by Richard Jack brings to our attention the tensions and harmonies inherent in combinations. Yet the strongest work on this exhibition was that in only one material, stone, where the artist has used his chisel to create contrasts in order to evoke our response. The power of the large marble *Youth* lies in the counterposition of the slender, sparkling white body against the rough, brown, uncarved base from which it rises. The shoulders gracefully echo the slope and curve of the hip creating movement and energy which is opposed by the solid heavy base.

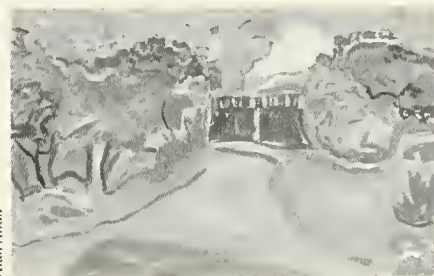


Staffer Gelling

Richard Jack, *Youth*

**Pero Rajkovic, Paintings and oil
pastels, Gallery Delta, October
1994**

Pero Rajkovic's paintings portray a joyous surrender to the powers of nature. His vibrant brushstrokes animate the vegetation and are related to a dynamic calligraphy, and in a way employ distortion in order to intensify the viewer's awareness of pictorial space. Arcs that seem arbitrary, either spanning the foreground or sky, launch a spatial thrust which vibrates the curvature of the horizon. These works try to obliterate the wars, famine, disease, which we have inflicted upon ourselves - and pay tribute to Mother Earth and her power. HL



Alan Allan

Pero Rajkovic, *The Gate*

Work from the **ZimSculpture (Pachipamwe) Workshop** will be exhibited at the Alliance Francaise from December 6th to January 6th. A selection of the innovative sculptures and paintings, already exhibited at the National Gallery, Bulawayo, will give Harare viewers a chance to see new developments, a break away from the tired old and now largely commercialised tradition of stone sculpture in Zimbabwe.

International naive paintings will be exhibited at Sandro's Gallery from November 30th to December 30th. Work from England, Denmark, Tanzania and Zimbabwe will be included.

The Zimbabwe Heritage Exhibition continues at the National Gallery until the end of January. A walkabout with the some of the selectors (Helen Lieros, Tony Mhonda, Nicholas Mukomberanwa and Sylvia Bews-Wright) will happen sometime in January. Go and see it and add to our collection of opinions!

Nicholas Mukomberanwa's work (1960-1995) will be exhibited in a one-man retrospective at the National Gallery in March. As one of the grand old men of the stone sculpture tradition in Zimbabwe, Mukomberanwa has produced work of a consistently high standard. It should be very interesting to see a large number of his best works together and to consider his progression.

Student work will be on show at Gallery Delta in January. This exhibition shows what the forthcoming generation of Zimbabwean artists are up to.

Spanish work will be featured in an exhibition, at Gallery Delta in March, of paintings by the Spanish Ambassador to Zimbabwe, inspired by the work of the poet and playwright, Lorca. The show will be accompanied by the production of one of Lorca's plays in the amphitheatre.



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The art magazine from Gallery Delta



No 3

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Gallery

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Cover: Crispin Matekenya, *Horse and Rider*, 1994,
100cm x 95cm, wood. Photo by Stoffer Geiling
Left above: Semina Mpofu, *Soul Music*, 1994, 40cm x 57cm,
stone and metal

Stoffer Geiling



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Publisher: Derek Huggins. Editor: Barbara Murray. Design & typesetting:
Myrtle Mallis. Origination & printing: A.W. Bardwell & Co. Colour:
Colorscan (Pvt) Ltd.

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Subscriptions from Gallery Publications, c/o Gallery Delta, 110 Livingstone
Avenue, P.O. Box UA 373, Union Avenue, Harare. Tel: (14) 792135.

Artnotes

Johannesburg is exploding with art! — galleries and public spaces filled with the work of creative artists from both within and without South Africa; people going to or coming from exhibitions, workshops, events, conferences, being stimulated by new ideas and sights; communities and individuals identifying and expressing themselves; statements being made and refuted; art and artistic concerns being discussed in the media on a scale not often experienced in Africa.

For two months, March and April 95, the Johannesburg City Council is hosting the First Johannesburg Biennale under the direction of Chris Till, previous Director of our Zimbabwe National Gallery. Chris is remembered above all for his public relations, diplomacy, energy and drive, qualities he will need to manage all the activities taking place during the Biennale. One columnist of the *Weekly Mail and Guardian* suggested Chris be given a crash helmet to protect him from further injury. He already has a broken nose, courtesy of one committee member!

The intent of this First Johannesburg Biennale is to generate dynamic exchange (preferably of an artistic nature!). To this end, there will be exhibitions from 66 countries, including Zimbabwe. Community and individual identities are the central focus with the diversity of artworks drawn together through two main themes: 'Volatile alliances' and 'Decolonising our minds'. South Africa is seeking its new post-apartheid artistic identity.

Cautious voices may say it is too soon, but why wait? Whatever is seen, shown, said, constitutes a beginning.

Reports say that organisation is chaotic, but chaos is fertile ground. Order in disorder? Mixture and flux generate individual initiative.

The juxtaposition of various cultures and individuals will, it is hoped, act as a catalyst for discourse and action. A conference entitled *Bua! Emergent Voices*, being held from the 2nd to the 4th of March, will discuss topics such as 'Re-defining cultural identity in Post-Apartheid South Africa', 'Traditions and Modernism in Africa' and 'Re-definition of Afrocentrism'. The latter two topics are particularly applicable to us here in Zimbabwe.

We have had 15 years to consider our cultural identities. When a 'new' country comes into existence, it carries with it its

cultural baggage from the past, and, as reflected in this magazine, Zimbabwe continues to struggle with the conflicts between tradition and modernism, with the issue of women's marginalisation, with the various effects, good and bad, of the West's influence on our artists and culture.

Forging an identity is never completed. As Iris Murdoch puts it:

"...life... has an irritating way of bumping and limping on, undoing conversions, casting doubt on solutions, and generally illustrating the impossibility of living happily or virtuously ever after... I felt too that I might take this opportunity to tie up a few loose ends, only of course loose ends can never be properly tied, one is always producing new ones. Time, like the sea, unties all knots. Judgments on people are never final, they emerge from summings up which at once suggest the need of a reconsideration. Human arrangements are nothing but loose ends and hazy reckoning, whatever art may otherwise pretend in order to console us."

What art can do is capture and express the knots, the loose ends, the hazy reckonings, the various stages and insights along the path of the society and the individual towards identity.

Young Zimbabwean artists are confronting traditions and conventions, finding and sharing their own interpretations of Zimbabwe's 'human arrangements' (see pages 3-6 and 20-21). Zimbabwean women are making their presence felt in art, though there are more than loose ends to tie up (see pages 9-12). Black and white Africans are speaking out against the West's narrow vision of our identities, forcing them to reconsider their 'summings up' and 'judgments' (see pages 7-8).

What Zimbabwe's contribution to the Johannesburg Biennale (see pages 13-16) does show is that our society is recognising the richness of diversity, the importance of open-mindedness and tolerance, and the role of art in extending our understanding of both ourselves and of each other.

The Biennale presents us with a wide platform, opportunities to learn, and hopefully, many Zimbabweans will be able to go South to benefit from the experience. We may not have the money and the resources to stage such a show, but Zimbabwe has many creative and energetic

individuals, and a society can only grow when its individuals do.

Here is a list of some of the exhibitions that will be part of the Biennale:

Johannesburg Art Gallery Installations : site specific works within the gallery by contemporary South African artists
San/Bushman Art, Past and Present
Taking Liberties — The Body Politic : preoccupations with the human body
Objects of Defiance/Spaces of Contemplation : women's experiences of the world
Volatile Colonies : a fundamental challenge to Western aesthetics
Space/(Dis)place : the physical and ideological limits of sculpture
Mamelodi Today, Mamelodi Tomorrow : celebrating a community through music, art, dance and performance
Windows, Doors and Bridges : Soweto murals
Kopano : artists working on the boundaries of tribal traditions and urbanised westernisation
Fax Project : artworks faxed from all over the world
Jobs, Journeys, Jo'burg : trekkers, migrants, borders, dislocation and identity fashioned through movement
My Area : photographic insights into diverse people's lives
Beyond Boundaries : a workshop of street art
Africa Earthed : bridging the contradictions and divisions in South African ceramics
Katlehong Art Centre : larger than life wire figures with moving parts
Arches, Murals and Trees : installations in public spaces
Mobile Art Gallery : a bus running workshops at various stops between Newtown and Soweto
International Print Exchange : dialogues across cultural and geographic boundaries by 44 international and South African artists

It is a pity that publicity and information about the events and exhibitions have not been fuller and more timely in Zimbabwe. However for those who cannot take part, in the next issue of *Gallery*, we hope to bring news, views and reviews of the Biennale and of how Zimbabwe's art scene and our artists stand by comparison.

The Editor

Art historian, Olive Maggs, considers the work
of four young Zimbabwean artists

Beaton
Matekenya
Meque
Sibanda

Changing directions

A few years ago, if you had asked anyone to tell you what was happening in the art world in Zimbabwe the answer would most probably have been about recent work by 'Shona' sculptors. Now, in 1995, we see the beginnings of a new chapter in the story of Zimbabwean art, inventive and exciting developments in painting by two already recognised painters, Luis Meque and Fasoni Sibanda, and innovatory use of subject and materials in sculpture by Keston Beaton and Crispin Matekenya.

All of these artists have exhibited at both Gallery Delta and the National Gallery. However, when their work appeared together in November 1994 in the Gallery Delta show entitled 'New Directions', there was no mistaking the strength of this new generation of Zimbabwean artists. Each one of these artists' work shows a desire for truth and sincerity, both in the approach to subject and to the materials and medium used.

There is a definite change of mood in this new generation of artists: an experimental attitude towards technique and materials; a self-conscious liberation from their cultural or artistic conventions. Their work shares a dependence on the impact of ordinary moments taken from everyday life and has a capacity for immense vision.

Let us take a closer look at these four artists who could herald the start of a new phase in the history of Zimbabwean art.

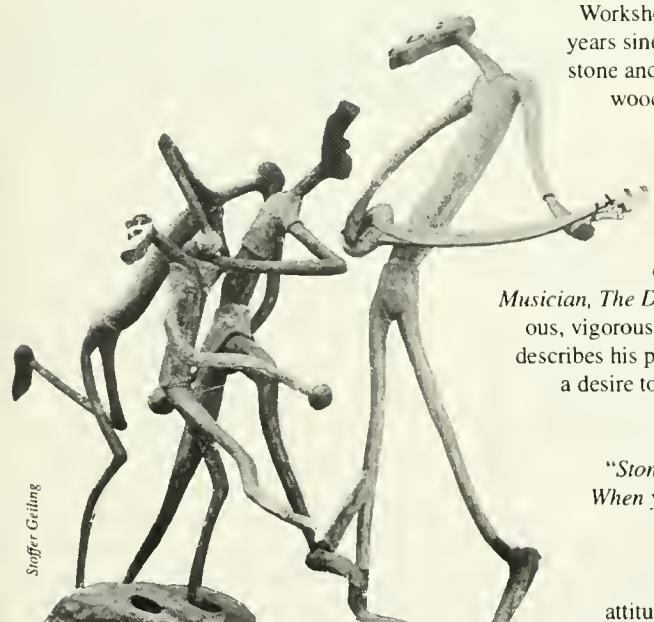
Crispin Matekenya lives in Karoi and was a BAT Workshop student in the late 1980s. He has spent some years since then experimenting in sculpture using mainly stone and wood. His present work appears in an unusual wood from the Mutsamvi tree which he works semi-smooth, leaving a certain amount of scratched surface. He then covers it with a layer of red polish, giving an interesting burnished quality.

Colour is used sparingly here and there to give added life. His subjects are taken from everyday life: *The Hoer*, *The Sadza Eaters*, *The Musician*, *The Dancers II*, *The Dugout*. They are lively, humorous, vigorous, and each one, hugely entertaining. Matekenya describes his preference for working in this particular wood as a desire to search for the subject and the form through the material. He says:

"Stone is like mealie meal. You can only cook sadza. When you use wood, you must use your mind. Without the creativity you cannot make anything."

We can interpret this as an infinitely modernist attitude to art. Quality in art depends not only on the raw materials, but on the imagination with which they are handled. Further, that art may lie as much in the thought process which it excites as in the appearance of the piece itself. This is the key to Matekenya's work, the essence of which is a sense of movement, which the artist insists comes from the wood itself, and his ability to recognise form combined with a sense of fun — his work makes one smile each time one sees the piece, and that is an achievement!

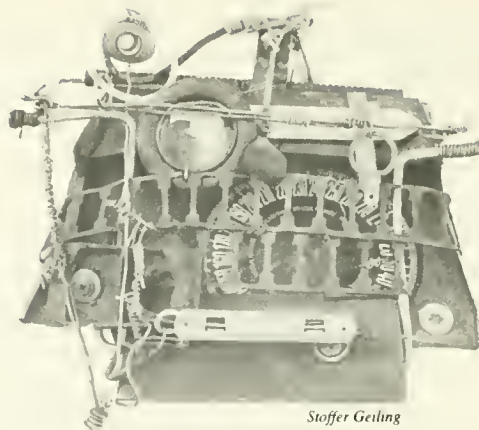
Crispin Matekenya,
The Musician,
The Dancers II,
1994, approx 150cm
x 150 cm, wood



Stoffer Ceiling

Art has been the subject of more experimentation worldwide in the last twenty years than in almost any other period. Preconceptions have been questioned and overturned; new media, in addition to new materials, have been pioneered. Keston Beaton's assemblages of various readymade objects can either amuse, for example, *Mbira Typewriter*, or shock. Rarely do they create any aesthetic emotion. Historically they derive from the readymades of Marcel Duchamp, the French Dada artist of the early years of this century and later, from the well-known assemblages of Picasso, using actual objects and raw scrap materials to make three-dimensional constructions.

Beaton's assemblages relate to this tradition yet his constructions are not created through revolutionary fervour but seem more motivated by nostalgia. There is something very comforting about his constructions, *Bentwood Harp*, and *The King's Harp*. The familiar materials used, such as pieces of scrap iron, steel wire, bolts and screws, convincingly come to life with a new personality. Although something of their origin still remains, they have been transformed, challenging our understanding of the identity of everyday life.



Stoffer Geiling

Keston Beaton,
Mbira Typewriter,
1994, approx 28cm x 20cm,
found materials

Fasoni Sibanda attended the BAT Workshop in the early 1990s. His work has appeared in Gallery Delta as well as in Zimbabwe Heritage Exhibitions 1992, 1993 and 1994; in the latter, he received the Overall Award for Distinction in Painting. Sibanda lives and works in Zengeza, taking his subjects from the busy, colourful environment of Zengeza and Seke. His subject matter, centred as it

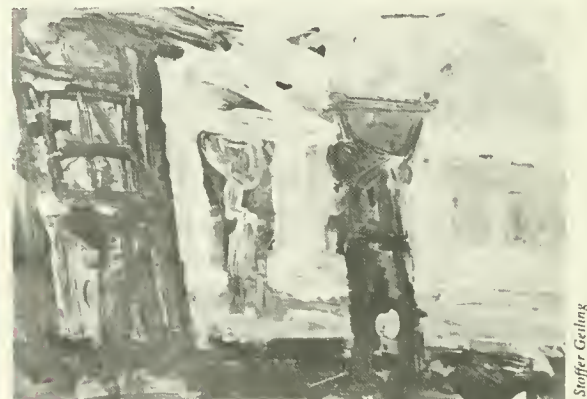
is on human existence and values, possibly places him unconsciously following the tradition of those imaginative innovators of modernism — artists like Seurat, Van Gogh and the young Picasso.

Sibanda sees himself as a witness, an observer of life. His works include subjects such as *Zengeza Market* and *Consulting the Elders*. However, to interpret his paintings as mere representations of life would be to only superficially touch the subject. *Firewood Gatherers* is a painting entirely in this mode, a familiar image from anywhere in the country, but the quiet strength of the processional



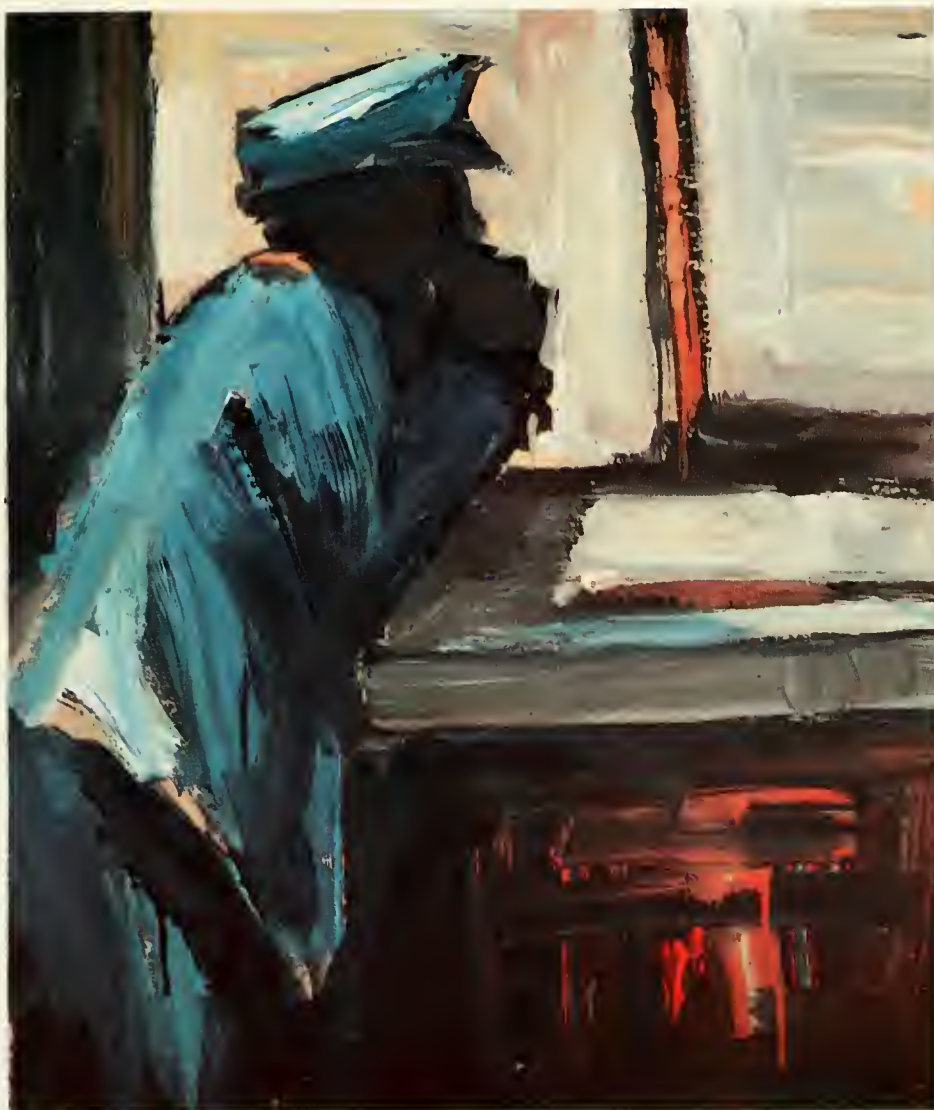
Stoffer Geiling

Fasoni Sibanda,
Firewood Gatherers,
1994, 85cm x 99cm,
mixed media (left)



Stoffer Geiling

Fasoni Sibanda,
Zengeza Market,
1994, 65cm x 47cm,
mixed media (above)



**Luis Meque,
The Guard, 1994,
69cm x 87cm,
mixed media (left)**

**Luis Meque,
I Love You,
1994, 68cm x 85cm,
mixed media (below)**

figures and the sense of atmosphere in this painting suggest something else. They remind us of Van Gogh's words in one of his letters to his brother, "*all reality is at the same time symbolic.*"

Using thick brushwork and heavily applied paint throughout his large figure compositions, Sibanda combines figures and surroundings, and so applies the same sentiment to the landscape as to the figures. His use of colour is uninhibited; his brushstrokes plainly visible on the surface. There is a feeling of confidence and freedom to improvise in his use of bold colours and forms. Although he would be the first to say he was still experimenting, Sibanda has already achieved an impressive style and we should expect further developments from this forward looking artist.

Luis Meque is Mozambican by birth and attended the BAT Workshop in the late 1980s. Since then his painting career has gone from strength to strength. He is at present arguably the artist with the most uniquely recognisable style in Zimbabwe. He has shown his work in a number of Gallery Delta group shows and in the Zimbabwe Heritage Exhibitions of 1988, 1989, 1992, 1993 and 1994, having obtained the Overall Award for Distinction in Painting in 1993. In 1994, he had solo exhibitions at Gallery Delta and at the National Gallery which also holds a number of his works in its



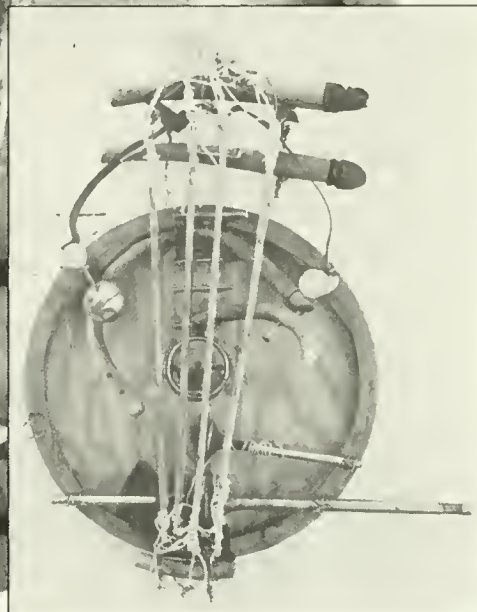
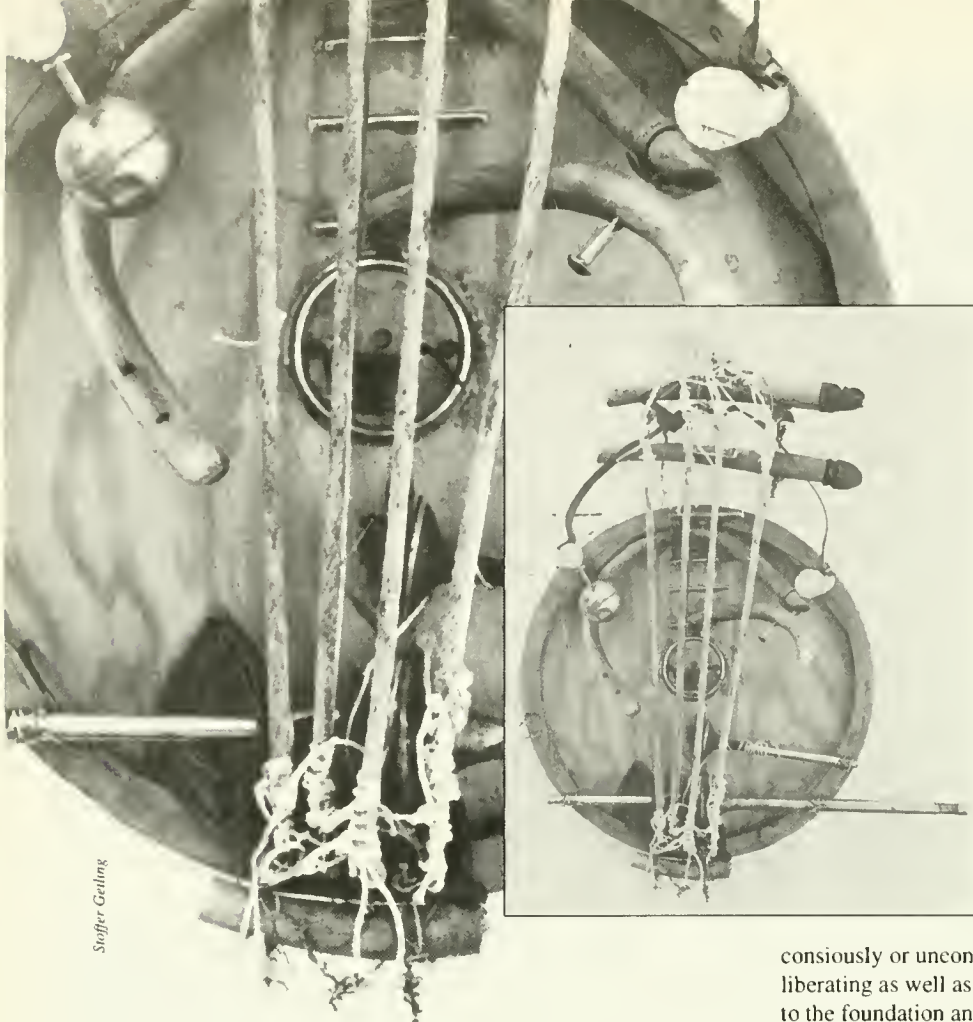
permanent collection. What is it about the work of this artist that is so special?

Walking into a room of Meque's work is like walking into a room where everyone is involved in private conversations. You intrude into a claustrophobic world of personal involvement, of subjective emotionalism. Meque often takes his subjects from the world of the nightclub, the beerhall or the street corner. There is no explicit message, no drama. His figures, painted in bright colours, emerge out of the darkness of their background, and are caught in a timeless, motionless state. This is further emphasised by the total absence of background, perspective and detail, leaving a crude composition with a rugged and unrefined touch.

Paintings such as Meque's *The Guard* take a hold of one. They demand your attention because something intense is taking place. The detail, however, never becomes clear. Jagers, the mid-twentieth century British sculptor said, "*Exaggeration and modification are the prerogative of the creative artist.*" Meque understands that one of the most important aspects of an expressionist's style is created by using striking outline and form. Subordinate forms, that might undermine the overall impact, are removed.

Meque also has the ability to choose subjects that one instinctively feels matter hugely. This may result from a deep emotional

Keston Beaton,
Bentwood Harp,
1994, 87cm x 63cm,
found materials



encouraged students to experiment with materials, introduced them to the work of modern European artists, and helped them to extend their subject matter beyond the myths and legends so popular with 'Shona' sculptors. Wade himself, as a non-Zimbabwean, was free from the cultural heritage carried consciously or unconsciously by the students he taught. He was a liberating as well as an inspirational example to those he taught and to the foundation and development of the workshop in the midst of the conformist and conventional nature of Zimbabwean culture.

involvement with the content of his paintings. He has not found it easy to settle here in Zimbabwe. He says, "Life was tough for me." He speaks of problems he has with close relationships, there is a sense of loneliness, of alienation... "I paint about love." Certainly we see this as a recurrent theme in works like *I Love You* and *Girlfriend*. Perhaps it is the sense of being apart from the crowd that has enabled Meque to develop such an individual and expressive style with immense vision.

Claes Oldenburg said that to give birth to a form is the only act of man that has any consequence. If this is true, Meque has accomplished nothing less than a vision of indigenous people that stays fixed permanently in the mind, encompassing both the colour and the culture of the country. When I eventually leave this country, it will be Luis Meque's vision of Zimbabwe that I will take with me.

Of all the art produced at the present time here in Zimbabwe, the work of Crispin Matekenya, Keston Beaton, Fasoni Sibanda and Luis Meque must be some of the most representative of the new spirit in the country. How is it that these four artists display a readiness to experiment, consciously searching for a new language, discarding the conventions of modernism in art here to date?

Looking for something that they all share in common we find their training at the BAT Workshop. Meque, Beaton and Matekenya were at the workshop in the late 1980s, Sibanda in the early 1990s. One of the workshop's early tutors was Paul Wade from England, a rebel by temperament, who brought with him ideas from his art school training in Britain. At the BAT Workshop, he created an environment which

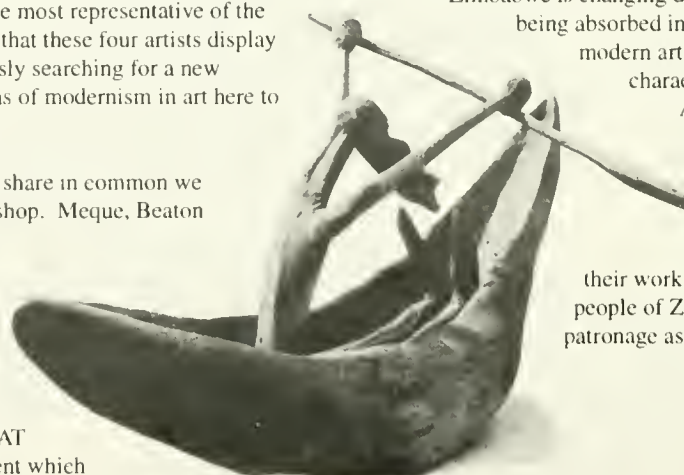
Such evolution and progression is nothing new to Africa. In 1989, Frank Willet wrote:

"African art has always been subject to change, and it appears that this rate has accelerated during the present century, due to the ever increasing influx of Western ideas and technology."

Regrettably this has led to many of the old African ways of life being forgotten. But it has been said that the second half of the twentieth century is proving to be a period of artistic renaissance for Africa.

Beaton, Matekenya, Meque and Sibanda are going through a stage of varied explorations, excited by the art of other countries, rather as European artists were stimulated by African and Oceanic art at the beginning of this century. Surely this cannot be regarded as a fatalistic situation, but rather as a natural evolution. The art of

Zimbabwe is changing direction. These artists are now being absorbed into the international world of modern art, which itself owes some of its character to the stimulus of traditional African art. It seems the wheel has come full circle. What is important is that, in time, these artists can assimilate the artistic traditions of their ancestors into their art and that their work finds patronage more with the people of Zimbabwe than with visiting patronage as it is at present.



Crispin Matekenya,
The Dugout, 1994,
102cm x 59cm, wood

The labelling of 'ethnic' art was the focus of a conference attended and summarised here by Murray McCartney

The unspoken tyranny : looking South from Norway

"There are two alternating and yet complementary pulsations in our century's involvement with primitive societies and the idea of the primitive: a rhetoric of control, in which demeaning colonialist tropes get modified only slightly over time; and a rhetoric of desire, ultimately more interesting, which implicates 'us' in the 'them' we try to conceive as the Other."

(Marianna Torgovnick, *Gone Primitive: Savage Intellects, Modern Lives*, Chicago, 1990)

On the face of it, Oslo is an unlikely place in which to find a debate about the arts of Africa. Norway has no colonial history, only a modest number of immigrants from the continent, and a cultural inclination to look West and East as much as it looks South.

Enter Langton Masunda, from Bulawayo. Masunda arrived in Oslo six years ago to study economics, and stayed on; for the past two years he has been running the Galleri African Heritage, an enterprise which introduces art from Africa to Norwegians through its programme of exhibitions, and its changing stock of paintings and sculpture. The responses have been mixed. One of the big frustrations for Masunda has been the continuing public tendency to lump the art of Africa into a strait-jacket of exotic separate-ness. Contemporary shows are disregarded unless the work fits into the ethnic stereotypes which have been fashioned by European conceit and international tourism.

In an effort to lift the veil from Norwegian eyes, Masunda organised, in October last year, an international conference, *'Ethnic' Art in a Multicultural World*. Speakers from Zimbabwe, Zambia, Tanzania and the USA, as well as Norway, addressed an enthusiastic audience of artists, teachers, and curators.

"Art history is peculiar in its function as a master narrative, not only in that it is fundamental in its recognition and legitimation of art with a capital A, but that it seems to be the only discourse (unlike the discourse of literature or science) which protects its Western territory so rigidly that we find hardly any exception to its Eurocentric rules."

The words are from Rasheed Araeen, in his catalogue introduction to *The Other Story: Afro-Asian Artists in Post-war Britain*, an exhibition held in London's

Hayward Gallery in 1989. They were echoed at the conference by Norwegian anthropologist, Thomas Hyland Eriksen, who focused on the myths which the colonial context sustains, and on the dilemmas of authenticity which face artists from the non-hegemonic corners of the globe.

"The power of the colonial view of the world is greater than that of money; changing that view, is harder than nationalising the sugar mills."

Eriksen gave the example of Phillis Wheatley, the nineteenth century slave poet. Owned in Boston, she wrote sonnets in the Shakespearean style and no-one believed that she could have done them herself. The issue went to court, and when she had passed the 'test' to prove her bona fides, the immediate response was:

"Well, she may have written them, but they aren't authentic. Where are the calls for the wilderness of the forests? She's imitating the white man!"

So, suggested Eriksen, such artists have to deal with the culturally specific, so that we can regard it as unreal and exotic. The 'authentic' is everything that we are not, or would like to pretend that we are not. It is linked in turn to the 'myth of primitivism', that benevolent structuralist fiction built around those artists whose thought is not domesticated by writing and education, and who bring an 'original freshness' to their work. As long as the primitive stays primitive, he's not a threat, and doesn't have to be ranked; he can be admired from afar, and provide material for dreams. Harare galleries and dealers, some operating as far afield as California, are not alone in buttressing the thesis by their use of 'ethnicity' and 'naivety' as marketing endorsements.

Concerning the strategic response of contemporary artists to the dilemma of ethnic pigeon-holing, Eriksen agreed with the suggestion that they might take a leaf out of the book of the women's movement, which used the canon of 'women's art' out of political necessity. He referred to immigrants in Europe using their status self-consciously in the early years of assimilation; and to the Swami people of northern Norway using their own language as a tactical assertion of national identity. People who fight colonialism, he argued, cannot be post-colonial before they have been anti-colonial. As the Mozambican artist, Luis Meque, wrote recently:



Alun Allen

"By living in the ghetto I became a painter. I am black. I feel black. I paint black and my art is black."

An instructive parallel to colonial mythologising was presented by Eugene Metcalf, in his paper on American Outsider art. Outsider art is done by people who are without the social or cultural power to define what they do as 'art'. In 1945, French artist Jean Debuffet discovered a new kind of primitive art. Searching for forms to free him from the established social and aesthetic norms, for an art disconnected from civilised artifice and imposed traditions, Debuffet found, in Swiss mental hospitals, the raw and seemingly uncontaminated materials he sought.

Looking beyond aesthetics, it is necessary to review the way that 'otherness' is used by people to define and legitimate their own boundaries: the 'other' can only exist as being codified by the 'insider', and so it is to the 'insider' that we must look.

Tourism, for example, provides a model for this, in its establishment of a relationship between insiders and outsiders. The over-civilised and repressive nature of contemporary northern society, has made the preservation of other people and places something of a modern mission. Tourists use and control people and places, just as cultural insiders define normality and deviancy. Both have power. Mass tourism and its support institutions first developed at the turn of this century, at roughly the same time the modern idea of the 'other' was emerging through the development and professionalisation of anthropology.

**Hilary Kashiri,
After Work, 1993,
acrylic on paper.**

**Primitive,
exotic,
or
an expression of
contemporary
African reality?**

The development of both anthropology and tourism was prompted, in part, by the emerging belief that the progress of modernity had come at a terrible cost. One consequence of this has been the enshrinement of 'wilderness' areas in Africa; another has been the development of the market for meretricious (often called 'artistic') souvenirs, those false symbolic objects which indemnify the tourist for having been cut off from an authentic experience of the world, from physical contact with other human beings. African painting in a European idiom, for instance, has little place in this universe.

Nor are definitions of 'other' based only on geographical distance; they also relate to distance in time. Development, for instance, proceeds from the primitive to the civilised; cultural advancement stands in contradistinction to something 'further back in time'. Insiders do not study these categories, they speak in terms of them. The 'outsider' and 'primitive' are epistemological constructs: we think of the concept, and then impose it on others.

Metcalf invoked the history of black painting in America to amplify his thesis. Having more or less conformed to white aesthetic models at the turn of the century, it created more powerful and creative images of blacks in the Harlem Renaissance which coincided with the urban migration of the 1920s and 30s. The more recent development of 'new black art' still defines blacks as outsiders, and allows group self-definition by those who regard people of colour as 'other'.

This symbolic inversion — in which group membership is defined not by shared characteristics, but by the unshared characteristics of others — is, Metcalf argues, 'a tyranny never spoken or discussed'. If exhibitions such as the Zimbabwe Heritage have made tentative steps in the direction of opening a debate, they will make little serious progress until the issue is tackled in a more intellectually self-conscious way.

Langton Masunda had been moved to convene the conference by his unresolved feelings of uneasiness: at the limited knowledge of Africa demonstrated by the people he meets in Oslo; at the caution of clients when presented with art which falls outside their stereotyped views of how African art should look; at the arrogance and limited vision occasionally shown by those responsible for organising 'official' exhibitions of non-European art in Norway. The initiative was praised by those who lamented the absence of much post-colonial discourse in Norway. But the country's generally progressive development policies, and its freedom from the taints of imperial adventurism, were not enough to exempt it from the broader charges which the debate inspired. Thomas Eriksen quoted from a press review of Vikram Seth's award-winning novel, *A Suitable Boy*, which found it "funny that an Indian has written such a long book in English".

Langton Masunda, and the visual arts of the South, are not alone in their struggle. If the conference came up with no answers, it was because it was set no questions. What it did offer to those present, however, was an outline of the historical and political contexts within which the labelling of ethnic art takes place. Art is always political: what is 'beautiful' always has to do with who's doing it, and who has power.



Art can ignore, support or fight society's stereotypes.

Pip Curling examines the images of women created by Zimbabwe's women artists

Women + & the body politic

It is a great pity that it is necessary for the National Gallery to host the Longman Women Visual Artists Exhibition. The pity is not the exhibition itself but its implied stigma of separatism. One annual acknowledgement of women artists as specifically separate from the main body of artists only further serves to isolate women as different from the mainstream of cultural expression.

The Longman exhibition has no particular agenda other than the gender of the artists. For the sensitive viewer, however, many of the works on the second Longman exhibition, held in August 1994, carry a hidden agenda of women's attitudes towards themselves, their bodies and their relationship towards society. When a woman artist makes a work in

which she represents women, she does so with the burden of knowledge of the stereotypical images of women.

Women's bodies are the single most used and exposed objects in the media and the visual arts. Contemporary news magazine photographs represent 'third world' women as ignorant, poor, uneducated, tradition-bound, domestic and victimised. Western women, whose bodies adorn advertising campaigns, are displayed as sensual, overtly aggressive or submissively passive, provocative and, above all, available. What binds all these images of women together is a sociological sameness in that they reflect and represent men's greed and power. A Somali woman offering her empty, sagging breast to her emaciated child is as much a

sacrificial victim as is her western counterpart, the half-starved, etiolated model whose body spread-eagles the sleek lines of an expensive motor car in the pages of a glossy magazine. Enshrined in the collective psyche of humankind is the belief that women are physical bodies destined to be little more than breeding machines. Pregnancy and childbirth make women's bodies vulnerable. Marriage renders them marketable.

One of the favourite subjects for Zimbabwe stone sculptors is 'Mermaid' (a dangerous being who seduces young girls into rivers and transforms them into witches), another is 'Shy Girl' (a pathetic creature who hides her face from the world). In the West, the female nude has a long history of exposure. Imaged as goddess or idealised



Stoffer Gelling

**Colleen Madamombe,
Shy Bride,
1994, serpentine**



Stoffer Gelling

**Danielle Deudney,
The Queens of Infinite Space
(detail), 1994, colour photo**

beauty, the nude has been, in fact, nothing more than a sexual object to titillate the desires of men.

It is no surprise that women artists either circumvent the problem of facing their own bodies by painting landscapes; or they perpetuate traditional stereotypes about themselves. For example, paintings on the Longman exhibition such as *Wood at Dusk*, *Summertime*, *Winter Afternoon at Home* and *Garden Statue* are works about aesthetically pleasing visual escapism. Not that it is necessarily a bad thing to want to escape, nor that the work is less worthy for being pleasurable rather than didactic. If women artists choose to turn away and seek what is pleasant rather than confront what can be painful, they have an inalienable right to do so. Conversely, Luness Mhlope's paintings, *A Woman Suffers*

and *A Woman Carries a Burden*, perpetuate the image of women as helpless and do not encourage the woman viewer to re-image herself as able to overcome her suffering and her burdens. These works tread old well-worn paths without taking the initiative to break new ground.

Some women artists disclose a personal commitment to exposing the myths which have held women captive; others celebrate the essential femaleness of women's bodies. Colleen Madamombe's large stone sculpture, *Shy Bride*, is a restatement of the popular theme. The bride hides her face with her hands and exposes her buttocks. She is adorned by her hair and her skirt. Her legs, hidden beneath the skirt, are truncated and useless. The skirt is both a garment and a restriction to movement. These legs will

never walk; the bride is held captive in the cage of her own adornment.

In her triptych, *The Queens of Infinite Space*(1), Danielle Deudney examines the possibility of fantasy as a way of dealing with the plethora of photographs of women. Her 'Queens' are crowned with eggshells, roses and glass. But they are blinded by the same stuff as their crowns are made of.

The title of *Mother Going to the Clinic with Three Children* by Cecilia Chitemo is sufficiently informative for there to be no doubt as to the subject of the work. Her three children are all very young. Two are carried on their mother's back. This woman is literally a child-bearer. We don't know why she is going to the clinic. We wonder if she is going for family planning advice or if



Stoffer Geiling

Cecilia Chitemo,
Mother Going to the Clinic
with Three Children,
1994, textile sculpture



Stoffer Geiling

Bulelwa Madekurozva,
Self Portrait, 1994, oil

this is a routine visit. Are the children ill? Whatever the reason for her journey we know she is a mother and her strong upright body supports her children. Her breasts, although hidden by her blouse, are nevertheless carefully and meticulously modelled with an attention to detail that makes this work all the more poignant.

The young woman behind her guitar in Bulelwa Madekurozva's *Self Portrait*(2) is enigmatic. Her gaze is confrontational. The ghost of her alter-ego stares, wild-eyed, over her shoulder. This is not an idealisation of the self. It is an exploration of an individual into her own psyche. Madekurozva takes a long, cool, objective look at herself. The viewer looks at the artist. The experience is not voyeuristic so much as unsettling in its invitation to women to seize

the courage to examine themselves with the same unrelenting detachment.

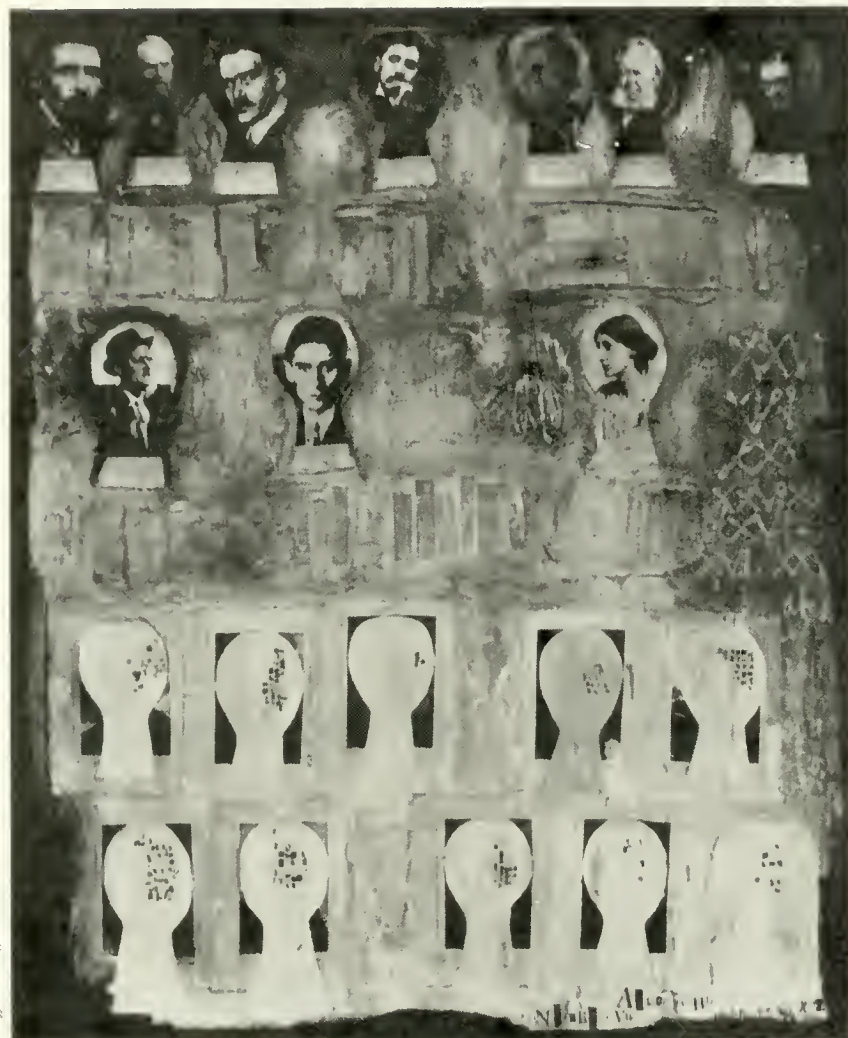
I am Not the One by Joan Dunstan (not illustrated) is about women abandoned by the fathers of their children. The unborn child is exposed in the womb of its mother as its father disappears off stage. This work is about the immutable fact that women are, literally, left holding the baby. It is about denial of responsibility for paternity. Its statement, like the stark black and white of the image, is clear and unequivocal. In Phillipa Browne's *Pregnant in the Plough* (not illustrated), a full frontal, nude, pregnant, female figure, is a similarly premeditated, unambiguous comment.

Female Harp (see Gallery no. 1 page 20) by Semina Mpofu, on the other hand, suggests an allegory on women's sexuality.

The musical instrument, lying supine, is passive and silent until roused by the hand of man. (The mbira is the instrument traditionally played by men.) The female 'body' in this work is a rhythmically curved, smooth piece of stone. At the base of the body, the half sphere is a metaphor for womb that envelops the harp whose keys hint at pubic hair. There are many possible interpretations of *Female Harp*. I have offered only one, informed by a particular and personal bias. When art proffers ambiguities of imagery it invites the viewer to engage in a dialogue to reveal its possible meaning.

Mary Davies' *Giants and the Lone Woolf* is a Western pun on a name, which the literate viewer will immediately associate with the title of Edward Albee's play, *Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf*.

Mary Davies,
Giants and the Lone Woolf,
 1994, mixed media



law allowed a man to divorce his wife if she appeared in public with her hair uncovered. St Paul told the early Christians that any woman who came to church bareheaded should have her head shaved. Tertullian, a father of the Christian church said, in the third century, *"The bloom of a virgin's face is responsible for the fall of angels and ought to be kept shaded when it has cast stumbling blocks even as far as heaven."* Buddha declared the body of a woman to be *"filthy and not a vessel for the law"*. At the University of Zimbabwe, in 1993, male students attacked a young woman because her skirt was, in their estimation, too short for their idea of decency. Her exposed legs were offensive to them.

Women, whose bodies are exposed to public debate and control, but whose lives are hidden in the private domesticity of the home, have learned to speak furtively about themselves. Other women have the power to turn the key in the locked door so that women's stories will be seen, heard and interpreted.

Adrienne Rich says:

*"Either you will
 go through this door
 or you will not go
 through."*

*"If you go through
 there is always the risk
 of remembering your
 name."*

Woolf, the token woman, joins the 'giants' of politics, science and letters. She is one of the important role-models for modern feminists and is most remembered for her call for every woman to have *"a room of one's own"*. Hence the key-holes in the work are a double entendre, they remind us of that room and are also the means by which a male voyeur might peep at bodies of women as they dress and undress. In the lower half of the work, the shapes of the key-holes become the faceless heads of women whose identities have been lost by men's distorted writing of their history.

Women's bodies have a history of being dangerous when exposed in any way. Jewish

Notes

1 These photographs were not on the Longman Exhibition. They were on the Zimbabwe Heritage Exhibition

2 This work was not part of the Longman Exhibition but was exhibited at the National Gallery's Polytechnic Students' Show.

*“....what we see here is an active demonstration
of the return to Africa
of the African artistic initiative
and Afrocentrism expressed
in a language that can generate interest
for the rest of the world.”*

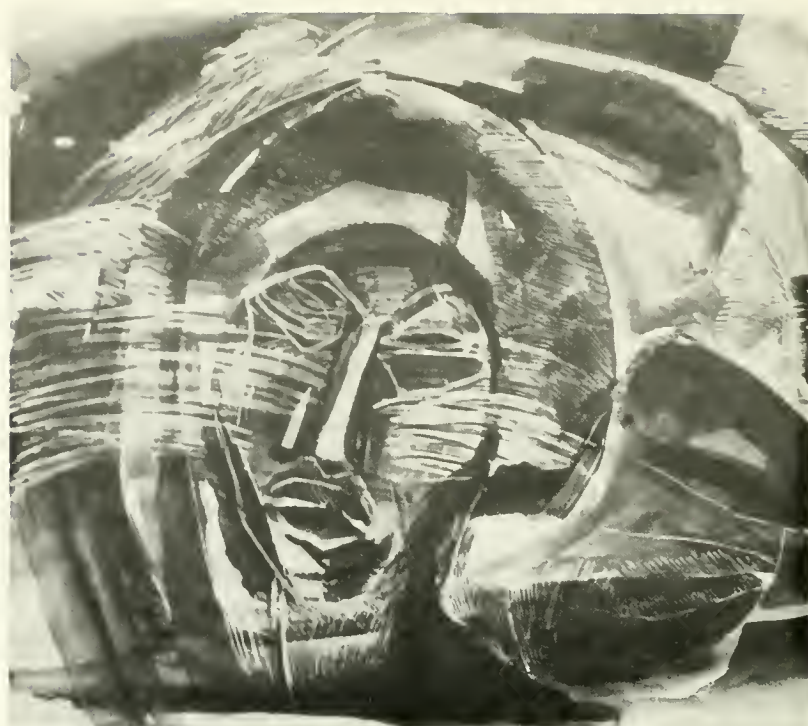


Thakor Patel,
Untitled, 1994,
poster colour

Taylor Nkomo

Towards an integrative source: A r t Z i m b a b w e

Curator, Doreen Sibanda,
writes about the Zimbabwean exhibition
at the Johannesburg Biennale



Last year I was invited to curate an exhibition of Zimbabwean art for the First Johannesburg Biennale, scheduled to run from the end of February through to the 30th of April this year. The exhibition is being conceptualised around two broad and inter-related themes and curators were invited to respond to these themes in any way they wished. The two themes are 'Volatile alliances' and 'Decolonising our minds'.

My original intention was to put together a collection of works in which the artists' images depicted races and cultures other than their own. Such an emphasis on race would be quite natural in Zimbabwe, where artists from different races and cultures have co-existed in a potentially volatile state for many years. My motivation was, more specifically, urged on by recent indications of some disquiet amongst the races.

To the contrary, what has emerged from my examination of the work being produced is the fact that most artists are drawing from the same source — that of the dominant cultural and social reality of Zimbabwe today.

It should be pointed out that artistically the colonial period in Zimbabwe was marked by few white artists that drew inspiration from Africa, and those that did, confined their work to broad and rugged landscape and abstract paintings. At the same time, most of the early black artists strove to imbibe Western perceptions of what African artists should be, and were content to produce non-controversial work with a strong portrayal of the tribesman image.

Since the mid-eighties, there has been a steady and strong move towards a more integrated perception of the dominant environment, culture and aesthetics, brought about mainly by an increase in communication amongst the artists, the mushrooming of art training facilities for African artists, and the participation by cross-sections of artists in practical residential art workshop situations.

Thus, my collection is a representation of recent work by prominent black and white artists of Zimbabwe, in an attempt to underline their increasingly innovative handling of materials, their preoccupation with local African phenomena, and to gauge the extent to which, as a result of several years of a multi-cultural environment with its acculturative and internationalising effect, the work is now moving towards a more integrated source — the specific source of Zimbabwe.

Helen Lieros,
Three Aspects of Man (triptych),
1995, pen, ink & wash

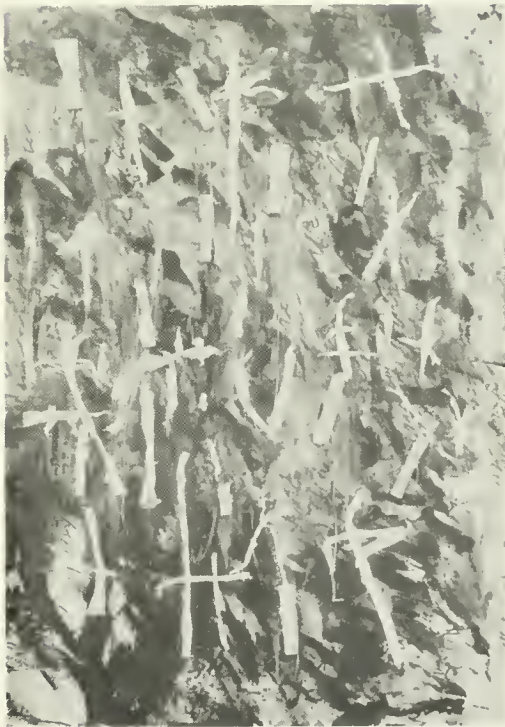


Suffler Gelling

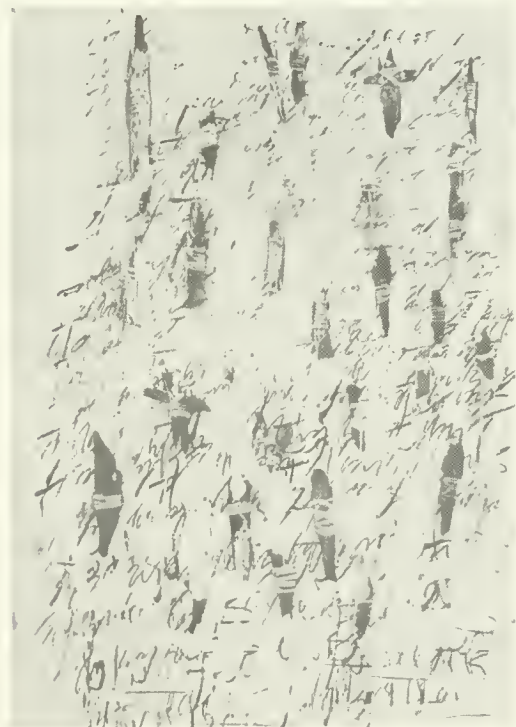
Gone are the works of anger and of urgency that featured prominently in the years immediately following independence, and although it is still possible to discern the individual artist's own history, experiences and preferences in the works, it is clear that all the artists, especially the white artists, are no longer looking to the metropolitan centres to provide their direction. Instead what we see here is an active demonstration of the return to Africa of the African artistic initiative and Afrocentrism expressed in a language that can generate interest for the rest of the world.

The stone sculptors that have been singled out for inclusion in the exhibition have surpassed the limitations that the world-wide success of the Shona sculpture movement has produced. These include Mukomberanwa and Nkomo. The more innovative and experimental sculptors are represented by Gutsa, Muzondo and Jack , who move towards a more personalised and ambiguous image.

Works by long-standing painters Patel, Mukarobgwa, Curling, Bickle and Lieros, reveal an interesting selection of ideas from the wealth of African mythology, cultural idiosyncrasies and material symbols that are finely tuned to their temperaments and experiences, while the new generation of young African painters is represented by artists Luis Meque and Fasoni Sibanda, both of whom engage in a broad handling of contemporary and urban issues.



Suffler Gelling



Berry Bickle,
T for Tears and African Alphabet,
1994, mixed media

Richard Jack,
Listening to the Wind,
 1994, serpentine & steel
 (below left)

Adam Madebe,
Quartet, 1994, stainless
 & mild steel
 (below right)

Art Zimbabwe

works to be included in the exhibition at the First Johannesburg Biennale

Berry Bickle, *T for Tears*, 198cm x 139cm, mixed media **Berry Bickle**, *African Alphabet*, 192cm x 137cm,
 mixed media **Pip Curling**, *Portrait of Juliana*, 91cm x 81cm, oil **Pip Curling**, *Interior, Borrowdale*, 202cm

x 107cm, oil **Tapfuma Gutsa**, *The Suitcase*, 152cm x 130cm, wood &
 steel **Richard Jack**, *Time to Share*, 52cm x 50cm, stone, wood, wool,
 steel & reeds **Richard Jack**, *Listening to the Wind*, 65cm x 31cm, stone
 & steel **Helen Lieros**, *Lobola*, 100cm x 87cm, mixed media **Helen**
Lieros, *Black/White Rider*, 108cm x 87cm, mixed media **Helen Lieros**,
N'anga's Dream, 158cm x 124cm, mixed media **Helen Lieros**, *Three*
Aspects of Man (triptych), 67cm x 61cm 61cm x 44cm (2), pen, ink &
 wash **Adam Madebe**, *Quartet*, 197cm x 115cm, stainless steel & mild
 steel **Luis Meque**, *Social Life*, 109cm x 83cm, mixed media **Luis**
Meque, *Lovers*, 109cm x 83cm, mixed media **Luis Meque**, *Violence in*

the Street, 109cm x 83cm, mixed media **Thomas**
Receiving the Breath, 112cm x 91.5cm, oil **Thomas**
We Came Across - Let's We Talk, 112cm x 91.5cm, oil
Mukarobgwa, *The Life Figure in the Country*, 112cm x
Nicholas Mukomberanwa *Watching*, approx 46cm x
Joseph Muzondo, *Looking Beyond the Year 2000*,
 serpentine, metal & copper **Taylor Nkomo**, *A Dream*,
 springstone **Thakor Patel**, *Untitled I*, 87cm x 56cm,
Thakor Patel, *Untitled II*, 87cm x 56cm, poster paint
Untitled III, 64cm x 53cm, poster paint **Fasoni Sibanda**,
 76cm, mixed media **Fasoni Sibanda**, *Untitled*, 84cm x

Mukarobgwa,
Mukarobgwa,
T h o m a s
 9 1 . 5 c m , o i l
 2 0 c m , s t o n e
 153cm x 37cm,
 68cm x 50cm,
 poster paint
Thakor Patel,
Kumusha, 99cm x
 61cm, mixed media



Stoffer Geiling



Stoffer Geiling

WORKSHOPS

Workshops are a problematic but essential part of the African art scene. Stephen Williams writes about the Thapong International Artists' Workshop in Botswana...



Stephen Williams

American sculptor, Fritz Buenher, at work outside the yellow tent

South African artist, Sophia Ainslie, talks about her work



Stephen Williams

Most people north of the Tati know Mahalapye only as a bend in the Great North Road or a blur of low dusty buildings glimpsed from a moving car or train window. But, in terms of art, the town has recently gained significance as the new home of the Thapong International Artists' Workshop.

The formative years of Thapong (1989 - 1991) were in Kanye, a small town in the south west of the country on the edge of 'the great thirst', the Kalahari Desert. However, since 1992, the workshop has been held on an annual basis at the Kanamo Centre, which nestles several kilometres off the main road along the northern bank of the Mhalatswe River, a river in the true Botswana sense — a broad expanse of sand which stores its water below its surface as protection against the intense heat.

A large yellow marquee has over the years become the heart of the workshop. Used to accommodate the painters, and the scene of

Hunting spiders of the yellow tent

many memorable extramural events over the year, the yellow tent has now become part of Thapong folklore. Apart from being intensely hot, the tent acts as a massive yellow filter which does bizarre things to the tonalities of the paintings being created inside it. Reds, yellows and oranges which appear almost fluorescent when applied often die when taken outside into the reality of daylight.

An analogous problem occurs at the Triangle Workshop in Pine Plains, New York, where painters work in old wooden barns which cast a dull brown light over their paintings.

The condition of light affects the way in which we see things. In Africa, the sun bleaches out colour and forms harsh, dark shadows. The way in which light transforms objects and affects colour has long fascinated artists. In essence, light was the



Stephen Williams

Nharo San artist, Thame Kaashe, at Thapong, 1994

... and Murray McCartney offers some alternate views in his opening address at the Pachipamwe Zimsculpture Workshop Exhibition at the Alliance Francaise in Harare

subject matter of Impressionist painters such as Monet who strove to record the effects of changing light in his series of *Haystacks* and *Rouen Cathedral*. Gauguin described shadows as the *trompe l'oeil* of the sun. What effect then does a brown barn in the USA or a yellow tent in Africa have on the development of our contemporary oeuvre?

Such considerations aside, other day to day hazards at Thapong include persistent swarms of mosquitoes, huge kamikaze rhinoceros beetles, scorpions and fleets of hunting spiders. Overseas visitors are particularly fascinated by the latter which, attracted by the projected light during night slide shows, race across the floor, pincers aloft, in search of prey amid much shrieking and raising of feet.

Thapong is to Botswana what the Pachipamwe Workshop is to Zimbabwe, but there the similarities end. Fundamental differences exist between the two workshops, particularly in the crucial area of organisation. Where Pachipamwe is run on an ad hoc basis, Thapong is managed by a standing committee which works collectively with a vision of promoting and elevating visual art in Botswana. By contrast, the Zimbabwean workshop staggers from one year to the next, not only without a permanent committee, but amidst much recrimination, politics and finger pointing. This aspect more than anything else has served to make the organising of the Pachipamwe Workshop a nightmare, with most people who have braved it swearing never to be involved again. Thapong employs a full-time co-ordinator who is based at the National Museum and Art Gallery in Gaborone and whose endeavours are actively supported by that institution. The pivotal organising functions of Thapong are thus firmly rooted within and controlled by Botswana's art community, a factor which has enabled the workshop to more successfully resist external manipulation than its Zimbabwean counterpart.

Thapong has received recognition in Botswana for the role that it has played in enriching visual art culture in the country and dragging it out of the dark ages. Just five years ago, Botswana had only a handful of acknowledged artists while most foreigners identified Botswana's contemporary material culture with the curio producers who ply their wares along the line of railway sidings at Shashe. By creating a forum for dialogue, innovation and inquiry, Thapong has nurtured a new generation of young Botswana artists who are ushering in a fresh view and awareness of contemporary culture.

This opening of the Zimsculpture Pachipamwe Exhibition gives me the opportunity to raise a number of points regarding the development of art and culture here in Zimbabwe, and given the 'independent' spirit of the Pachipamwe enterprise, the occasion is a most appropriate one.

When I wrote about last year's Pachipamwe in the press, I was critical of what I regarded as an under-representation of women in the process. The criticism stands. If we are to call attention, and I think we must, to the way women are marginalised in other realms of society — whether in parliament, churches, corporate boardrooms or community associations — I don't think we can allow exemptions to be claimed by the cultural sector.

There were criticisms of the 1993 Pachipamwe from other people... "*jolly good fun for the participants... orgy of self-indulgence... messy left-overs of the party...*" etc. There was, as well, talk of Pachipamwe pursuing "*the worst of western, modernist exclusiveness, rooted in the concept of art as commodity*" and a question: "*Can we afford the indulgence?*"

C a l l i t

Can we afford the indulgence? We can't not afford it. I don't think we have a choice. It is less an indulgence than a *fait accompli*.

I have suggested that the interests and rights of a gender analysis know no sectoral boundaries. I now suggest that the same is true of the market, and this should give us equal pause for quiet consideration.

And if the Pachipamwe Workshop — organised this time by the artists themselves, rather than what I called last year, the 'handmaidens' of external initiative — if the Pachipamwe Workshop is to face the market and deal with it honestly, then we must ask it to reflect on one or two important points.

Women. None? Few? Many? As organisers? As artists? Remember first of all, that the market is no respecter of persons; it is



**Keston Beaton,
Plant Form, in
progress at the
Pachipamwe
Workshop, 1994**

too with our sculptures and paintings: they are dragooned into service as icons of exotic-ness, as souvenirs of another reality.

To me, the Pachipamwe Workshop, and this Zimsculpture exhibition which it has created, is one of the few institutional bastions which can resist and challenge that construction of reality. And if I have sounded a few words of caution, it is only because I would like to see it strengthen its resolve and effectiveness even further.

Why do I call it a bastion? First, because of its internationalism; its disregard for either nation or race. Nine of the twenty-two participants here are from outside the country. This is not *Zimbabwean* sculpture, not *Zimbabwean* art.

Second, because it gives practical form to the notions of collective work and the community of knowledge; ideas cease to be private property; we can take inspiration from each other, as readily as we take it from ourselves or our surroundings.

Third, because of its unambiguous motivations. No-one hovered over the artists and said: I need so many pieces by such and such a date. No-one urged: I'm having a show called 'New Directions' and need something from you urgently. No-one commissioned any of these items to grace a new building or satisfy a personal whim.

f r e e d o m

essentially impersonal. It is unsentimental. It has more interest in appearances, than in truth; more concern for turning a coin than for rewarding integrity. It will control you. It will not *allow* you to consider the under-represented women; or the keen learners who may wish to break into your closed circle and study under your wings. It will take your self-expression, and transform it, by some species of alchemy, into self-interest.

And the market has another agenda. As we know, it is international, and as such it sets itself in a very particular relationship to art from the South. What does it want? Not work which is honestly to be put on a par with that produced in America, or Denmark, or England. Not at all. Just as our performing artists tend to be feted in the North to the extent that they validate a Northern notion of what is expected from Africa, so

What you see here, are the results of irresponsibility in its true sense. It is, if you like, above and beyond debates, or dictates. Some may call it license. Some may, indeed, deride it as indulgence. I prefer to call it freedom.

I don't think the works are here to be judged, and I have no intention of judging them — certainly not in the way that a competitive exhibition invites judgement. They are here to show you what happens when a group of artists get together and create, away from the usual routines of daily life, to stimulate both the artists' imaginations, and the debates and discussions which I have touched on.

I happen to hope that future workshops will offer us new talents, and new surprises. And I happen to believe that they can. It is my challenge to artists, to ensure that they do.

Reviews of recent work

Students' and young artists' exhibition, Gallery Delta, January/February 1995

A striking degree of confidence and exploration makes itself felt in this exhibition. The prevailing mood is one of hope. From this lively spectrum of young artists, it is possible to single out a number of painters and sculptors who may make a broader impact over the next few years.

Highlights include Amanda McKenzie's series of clay heads, Semina Mpofu's instrumental figures and a large delightful surprise in the garden, *Early Bicycle*, a metal sculpture by Richard Nyakabawo.

Semina Mpofu has a personal version of amalgamating stone and metal in her works, *Female Harp* and *Soul Music* (see Contents page). She pays tribute to her roots, so-called 'Shona' sculpture, but marries it to innovation, and adds grace to whimsical distortion.

The five clay heads, *Liberation*, *Distortion*, *Transition*, *Progression* and *Existence*, by Amanda McKenzie portray changes that are affecting the community.

They depict not only mythological, fictitious personalities, but also one's own experiences, and possibly reflect the impatient restlessness felt by many young artists.

Tendai Gumbo relays a personal cosmology in her painting, *Window and I*, as a victim

behind glass, a kind of psycho-symbolic prison from which the central figure peers out bleakly in an attempt to escape, or dangles powerlessly in its shadow. Her graphic, mixed media monotype, *Puppet*, allows us to concentrate on the expressive potential of surface texture and pictorial form.

In Anke Bohne's works, the viewer is hard pressed to determine whether the images portray angst-ridden, ironic or autobiographical studies. By contrast, Dylan Lloyd's drawings/paintings demonstrate the belief that "drawing is really about precision, balance and discipline not just representation".

The Luis Meque influence, his way of approaching the subject and application of paint, is hopefully disappearing. The young artists on this exhibition embrace human experiences of people, their relationships to things, relationships to places whether landscape or cityscape, or portray the moral, social concerns of this moment and address the issues of the day. Their work sings in celebration of colour, light, form, and the joy of seeing and discovering through the process of art. HL



Tendai Gumbo,
Window and I (above)

Richard Nyakabawo,
Early Bicycle (left)

Amanda McKenzie,
Distortion (below)

Anke Bohne,
What I'm Living For



Berry Bickle, Other, Gallery Delta, November 1994

This exhibition of work by possibly Zimbabwe's most provocative artist raises many questions. It is an offer and a challenge, an invitation and an argument

such as *My Mother's Daughter* and *Dressing Jennifer*, confront the viewer with the stark garment worn by prisoners. They are about the stripping away of detail in order to find the essentials of identity, about alienation, grief and pain. These works try

Tendai Gumbo,
Ceramic I



Sofier Gellins

a n d forthcoming exhibitions and events

that can be experienced through the individual's encounter with the art. Berry Bickle sees her works on paper as preliminaries to the three dimensional work, yet it is here that those who remember her fine early paintings and drawings find pleasure. Her sensitive use of line and sparingly applied colour in the Ibo series, capture places and impressions with a delicate sureness.



Berry Bickle

**Berry Bickle,
*My Mother's
Daughter*
(details)**

to step back from emotion by presenting the bare facts. In some cases, the impact of the work is diluted by the addition of distracting detail.

In contrast to much that we see in Zimbabwe, Berry Bickle's work is not readily accessible. Many viewers are left puzzled, finding it hard to understand and decode her meanings. There are many ideas, contradictions, indecipherable details. Perhaps, in order to communicate more fully, some of these ideas need to be

clarified and worked into a more coherent statement. Berry Bickle's work is important for our local art scene. It provokes discussion and cuts into our complacent artistic parochialism. BM

Annual art exhibition, Harare Polytechnic, November 1994

Despite their small staff and minimal resources, the Graphic and Fine Art Department of the Harare Polytechnic (so far Zimbabwe's only art school, is doing a good job. This exhibition featured a wide variety of work by students from all three years and all disciplines. Individual style was evident in the third year painting and ceramics sections, particularly work by Tendai Gumbo, Amanda McKenzie and Stephen Rowley. There was some striking work amongst the first years, including figure drawings by Dylan Lloyd and Amelia Marinova. The second year graphic design section was outstanding, revealing a combination of fresh ideas and professional execution. Hopefully the publishers and advertising companies were there to take note of promising talent. Only the textiles were dull. Some experimental work with a wider range of materials, exploring the potential they have, seems necessary. The standard of work from Polytechnic students overall has risen markedly and augurs well for Zimbabwe's upcoming generation of artists. BM

Whereas the drawings and paintings such as *Measure of Wind* and *Washed Up and Found*, are poetic, the three dimensional works are disturbing. They deal with concepts of identity and show the artist's willingness to experiment, to explore, to search for meanings. They move between different materials and mediums, incorporating raw draughtmanship, slashed canvases, uneven stitching, wrapped twigs, embedded tinted nails, porcelain, wood, metals. The palette is deliberately limited, with many of the images surrounded by predominantly white, raw surfaces to create space. The line is again evident in the use of slashing, twigs and metals.

Experiences from Mozambique, Cuba and childhood are evoked through use of spoons, suitcases, dresses, books. Pieces in the suitcase series, such as *Mission Box* and *Case for Angels*, contain tension and humour, continuing earlier investigations into the psychological baggage that individuals carry. The dresses, in works

What a load of rubbish! will be on show at the National Gallery, Harare, at the end of March. Proposed by the innovative company who keep our paper, cards and T-shirts etc. humming with good ideas, Design Inc, this exhibition of creative recycling may have some surprises in store for us.

Sylvia Bews-Wright, a Canadian artist currently living in Zimbabwe, will be showing mainly acrylics in her show, *My New Found Land*, at Gallery Delta during March. These works celebrate her feelings for the African environment.

In March/April at Gallery Delta will be an exhibition in homage to the Spanish poet and playwright, Lorca. The paintings by **Jesus Carlos Riosalido Gambotti**, symbolise his feelings about and understanding of Lorca's various works. A production of one of the plays and live Spanish music are planned for the Gallery Delta amphitheatre.

BAT Workshop Students' Exhibition at the National Gallery, Harare, in May, provides an opportunity to spot new talent. The workshop has produced some of Zimbabwe's most promising young artists including Luis Meque, Keston Beaton, Fasoni Sibanda and Crispin Matekenya.

If you missed the exhibition at the Alliance Francaise in December, work from the **Zimsulpture (Pachipamwe) Workshop** will be shown at the National Gallery in April. With their larger space, it is hoped that the Gallery will be able to exhibit a much wider range of the work produced, if not all of it.

The First Johannesburg Biennale opens on the 28th February and runs until the 30th of April. Exhibitions and installations as well as workshops, community events and a conference will take place at various venues throughout the city. For information on events you can contact the staff of the Biennale in Johannesburg. Tel: 27-11-838 6407 Fax: 27-11-833 5639.



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The art magazine from Gallery Dana

No 4

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Gallery

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Cover: Helen Lieros, *Cataclysm*, 1994, 112 x 86cm, mixed media.
Photo by Dani Deudney

Left: Zephania Tshuma, *No Way To Go*, 1986, 75 x 10 x 10cm,
painted wood

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Publisher: Derek Huggins. Editor: Barbara Murray. Design & typesetting:
Myrtle Mallis. Origination & printing by A.W. Bardwell & Co. Colour by
Colourscan (Pvt) Ltd. Paper: Express from Graphtec Ltd.

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Subscriptions from Gallery Publications, c/o Gallery Delta, 110 Livingstone
Avenue, PO Box UA 373 Union Avenue, Harare. Tel: (14) 792135.

Artnotes

In his last interview, Job Kekana said, "When you travel between people it makes your knowledge stronger," and, despite all the criticism levelled at the Johannesburg Biennale, it did offer opportunities to 'travel between people'. Problems occurred in the gaps in communication — the viewer's inability to understand the message or the artist's inability to convey it successfully? Much of the work on show was installation with explanatory text accompanying it to help the viewer cross those gaps, which in some cases were more like chasms. For example, the exhibition Volatile Colonies included, amongst others, a corner of a room filled with cardboard boxes, planks, a painting obscured by plastic wrapping propped against a wall, paint brushes, glue, nails, tins (this a work by the renowned Karakov). Other pieces on this show were a blank video machine in a room of its own with wires on the floor, and, a glob of melted plastic on a marble table.

Capelan's *Stepping Out of the White Cube* (A Little Song for Johannesburg) consisted of two rooms, walls hung with seemingly random clocks, cotton scarves, scribbled messages; on the floor, blocks of wood, builders' rubble, brooms, buckets, cement bags. While I was looking, a workman came in and propped up a step-ladder. When I asked, Is it part of the installation? he replied, I don't know I just borrowed it. So what about the buckets and brooms? According to Capelan's writing on the wall, content in art can arise from: representation, verbal statement, medium, material, scale, duration, context, art historical reference, iconography, formal properties, attitudinal gestures and biological response. That about covers anything. I left feeling that a long esoteric explanation would be needed and might still fail to arouse a response, intellectual or otherwise.

The French exhibited 'sculptures' by Bertrand Lavier: a dirty fridge door; an orange plastic traffic cone; a wire magazine holder and an aluminium milkcan, each one a separate work. When Duchamp exhibited his urinal it was a challenge, but that was 50 years ago! If Lavier had a new message I certainly missed it.

Untitled by Marcos Benjamin from Brazil consisted of a wheel of wood, curved and stuck together leaning against a wall, and three riveted metal double cones, one covered in old canvas, one of rusted iron, one of aluminium. It was simple, quiet, with pleasing shapes, textures and colours, but its content, out of context, was unfathomable.



Barbara Murray



One work that appealed to me was a sculpture from Cuba made out of open books tied together with sisal to form a simple, eloquent boat. The books' open pages revealed Cuban literature, science, geography, poetry, painting, politics, history. Here the metaphor worked subtly and evocatively to convey the cultural journey towards identity.

Much of the work from Africa was conventional by comparison and the Zimbabwean curator's choice was sadly static and low key. However amongst the best was one wonderful surprise from Africa, a work by Angolan Antonio Olé entitled *Margem de Zona Limité*: the sound of lapping water and rough men's voices talking quietly in Portuguese; a space constructed of rusted and patinated corrugated iron, wooden doors, metal gates; in the centre, a metal boat



Barbara Murray

Andries Botha, *Dromedaris Donder!* ... *En Ander Dom Ding*, 1994, approx. 4 x 4 x 2m, rubber, wattle and metals

broken in two; one half filled with bricks and a TV set showing a video of water flowing beneath a prow; the other half filled with official papers; a crow perched on each end; a fishing net. The atmosphere was extraordinary, invoking a multitude of impressions and thoughts.

One of the few 'beautiful' experiences was *Broom Dream* from Réunion: a dark room, floor covered with thick sand, a broom leaning against the wall just visible in the shaft of light from the doorway; enter into black; at the far end, in the sand, a pink sandstone; a small circle of light from above revealing indentations, skull-like, soft edges, shadows. It was lovely, evocative, resonant.

The South African work exposed a preoccupation with violence: cut-off body parts, knives, human hair, menacing kitchen implements, blood, thorns and accompanying titles such as *It Won't Hurt*. For me, one of the most successful works was *Dromedaris Donder! ... En Ander Dom Ding* by Andries Botha; a huge sculpture, approximately 12ft high and as long, encompassing superb craftsmanship and cohesive conception; a powerful mixture of strength, foolishness and aggression.

Art is an entrance into a world of sensation and experience; an opportunity to explore and question new possibilities. The conceptual First World art made the expressive Third World art look naive and simplistic, while the Third World art made First World art look arid and intellectualised. Critics said the Biennale did not analyse and redefine South African identity, but each individual needs to make this attempt, and the Biennale certainly provided a plethora of visually astonishing material around which such redefinition develops.

The Editor

Marcos Benjamin, *Untitled*, 1995, approx. 3 x 3 x 3m, wood, metal and cloth

Enezia Nyazorwe,
A Story About Termites,
1991, 60 x 90cm,
PVA on board



Dani Deudney

Refusing to succumb to trends in hegemonic Western art, Pip Curling introduces her selection of work that will represent Zimbabwe in Grahamstown this year

Art about Zimbabwe

One often hears, from the proponents of avant-gardism, a wail that Zimbabwean art is 'safe' and that Zimbabwean artists should strive to be 'more experimental'. What is this lemming-like instinct for self-destruction? A quick flip through some art magazines, accompanied by a sequence of desperate intellectual gymnastics to come to terms with the surfeit of blood and snot, can leave all but the most committed post-modernist sickened, fatigued and bewildered.

The exhibition, entitled 'Art About Zimbabwe', which will represent this country at the Standard Bank Festival in Grahamstown from 6 - 16 July 1995, might be perceived by some as 'safe' and 'nice'. It is an exhibition with a clear narrative content, intentionally unfettered by contemporary Western aesthetic precepts. It aims to be entertaining as well as informative. As a whole it speaks about a place, its people and its history. Accordingly works have been selected for their accessibility to a wider cross-section of the viewing public. The exhibition is a celebration of the vision and aspirations of the people of Zimbabwe. Images include those of the banal events of everyday life as well as humour, tragedy and violence.

There are forty works on the exhibition, each by a different artist. Diversity of subject matter is reflected as is a variety of media. The title has a double meaning in that the art tells about the country and it comes from different geographical areas. A thread is drawn from the representational paintings of the schoolboys under the tutelage of Canon Ned Paterson at Cyrene Mission in the 1950s to the continuing prevalence of figurative watercolour painting in Matabeleland.

Tapfuma Gutsa, *Nehanda's Defiance*,
1981, 84 x 25cm, ebony



Dani Deudney



**Marvellous Mangena,
Mtshongoyo Dancers,**
1991, 43 x 79cm,
oil on board



**Givas Mashiri, Mufakose
Shopping Centre,** 1995,
60 x 77cm, oil on canvas
on board



**Phillimon Chipiro,
African Home,** 1986,
82 x 88cm, oil on canvas

Early examples of work by the artists of the National Gallery Workshop School demonstrate the vigour of that genre which is particular to the northern half of the country. Women's art-making is represented by their traditional materials of clay and textiles; their subjects are those particular to themselves. Innovative use of found materials abounds in sculpture made from wire, tins and rags. Works such as Zephania Tshuma's *No Way To Go*, Morris Tendai's *The Trouble With Money* and the Tashinga Group's *Violence Against Women* testify to pertinent social issues.

Zimbabwe stone sculptors' work is acknowledged but is situated within the broader framework. Artists such as Thomas Mukarombwa and Nicholas Mukomberanwa, who have achieved international recognition share the stage with unknown urban painters and anonymous rural sculptors.

Marvellous Mangena has achieved notable success with his heightened naturalism. *Mtshongoyo Dancers* marries the past with the present as the traditional ceremonial dance is performed in a modern football stadium.

Givas Mashiri is a self-taught painter and sculptor who lives in Mufakose, a high density suburb of Harare. He owns and runs a tuck-shop which is also his studio. His painting *Mufakose Shopping Centre* is a romanticised view of a place familiar to him. The details of the shops, the people, the dustbins and the bushes are all given the same uncompromising attention.

Atalia Nyoni was one of the first tapestry weavers to be trained at Cold Comfort Farm outside Harare. This tapestry *Beer To Fetch Rain At The Matopos* tells of the events she remembers as a child when beer was brewed and the people danced to call the rain. There is a large cave in the Matopos Hills near Bulawayo that is a sacred place and home of the Great Spirit.

Enezia Nyazorwe was a member of the Weya Training Centre art project near Macheke. Her painting *A Story About Termites* is in the decorative colourful Weya style of flat images in a crowded shallow space. It tells a fantasy story of villagers who try to gather termites to eat but are fooled by clever dancing dogs.

Joram Mariga was one of the earliest stone sculptors to be encouraged by Frank McEwen, the first director of the National Gallery in Harare. His small sculpture *Uncle Holding Baby* shows the uncle holding the baby awkwardly upside-down behind his back. It is said to be the way to drive out the nightmares of a small child.

Nehanda's Defiance, an early work by Tapfuma Gutsa, concerns Mbuya Nehanda who is revered in Zimbabwe as being the leader of the first war of liberation. She defied the settler authorities, calling on the people to rebel.

No Way To Go (see illustration on Contents page) is by Zephania Tshuma who lives in Matabeleland. His work is well known for its pithy social comment.

This exhibition is a challenge to Africa to assert its own values. As the Dadaists and their followers challenged the nature of 'art', so too can their concept of art be challenged by a return to figuration, narrative and the traditional ways and means of painting and sculpture. There is something infinitely precious to be lost by genuflecting to the worst gods of contemporary art. We could lose our sense of identity and our willingness to communicate with each other in terms we can all understand.



Dani Deudney

**Joram Mariga,
Uncle Holding Baby, 1957,
29 x 20cm, green serpentine**



Dani Deudney

**Atalia Nyoni, *Beer to Fetch Rain at the Matopos*, 1995,
90 x 80cm, tapestry**

I have **a Gallery in Africa**

By special request of the editor,
and dedicated to Helen Lieros,
Derek Huggins, founder, creator
and director of Gallery Delta,
writes about the origins of one
of the dynamic art centres
on this continent

Recently, on the 17th April 1995, we celebrated 20 years of Gallery Delta. We marked the event with an exhibition of paintings, graphics, sculpture, textiles and ceramics, with one work each by about 35 artists, all of whom we have shown and promoted during the two decades, many of whom are today's most prominent contemporary artists in Zimbabwe, and who collectively represent a much larger body of artists who have come and shown and gone over the years. It was seen to be, piece by piece, work by work, a fine exhibition and I remarked on the opening night that while in every decade there emerge outstanding artists and works of art, we would have been hard-pressed to have mounted such a broad, diverse and quality show 20 years ago; and the reason we are able to do so now is because the creative and artistic pool into which we can cast our hook has greater depth, more professionals and professionalism than ever before. This exhibition was, so far as we have been

able to ascertain from our records, *about the three hundredth exhibition we have mounted and promoted.*

I am often asked, by the experts and the curious alike who visit and admire the gallery and the art it contains: How did this happen? How did you begin? Where do you come from? Who are you? Most often surprise is expressed at my explanations... if they are able to elicit them...

The short reply is to simply say that I married an artist. But really, if I am to be honest, there is no simple answer because there is history in all men's lives and in this game of chance we play in life there are the circumstances in which we find ourselves at a given time; there are opportunities or lack of them; there are the politics and the personalities; there is history unravelling; there is the art, the artists and the work they produce; there is the personal involvement and commitment; I can only tell it as a story in my own way: the way I have known it to be; and the truth of a long and patient struggle that has become the way and the purpose of my life.

Salisbury, Rhodesia, in 1967, when Helen Lieros and I came here from Gwelo, was a different place in a different time, and that applies as much to its artistic and cultural state as to everything else. It was to us, however, 'the big city'. First Street was still open to two-way traffic. There still stood the old Palace Theatre with its

strategic corner split and sawdust long bar frequented by extraordinary characters. On Second Street, Old Meikles was fronted by twin lions, then through the door to the Causerie bar. And despite its slow pace, there were the political tensions which we had to suffer daily: UDI, the split from Britain and economic sanctions were in their second year; the African nationalist movements were gaining strength; incidents of sabotage were becoming more frequent and the coming of an armed conflict began to appear inevitable. Against this backdrop, however, we were young and anonymous, and in that, still hopeful of making our lives in the city and making a contribution: Helen Lieros was an artist and teacher, and I, a detective in the CID. Helen had been commissioned to paint four large murals in the Greek Orthodox Cathedral and my fate was to walk the gloomy corridors of Police Central.

Despite the uncertain security situation and our unknown fates that politicians at home and around the world were deciding, the sun still shone and the flamboyants still bloomed magnificently. Soon we were to become familiar with the art happenings, such as they were then, and to get to know the artists and personalities of the time. There was the Rhodes (now the National) Gallery, that fine modern building which graced old King's Crescent with the palms outside and the wonderful gardens behind, and which was the realisation of the plans and dreams of a few wise men who included Brian O'Connell, Pat Lewis and Athol Evans amongst others, who had encouraged Sir Stephen and Lady Courtauld to help create it in the late 50s. The first director of the Rhodes Gallery was Frank McEwen who had come out of the British Council fold and from Paris where he had been acquainted with the greats such as Picasso and Matisse. He had founded, in a very short time, the Central African Workshop School and 'Shona' sculpture, and championed both from under the Rhodes Gallery roof. Henry Thompson, the painter, had talked enthusiastically and with nostalgia, over coffee, about McEwen and his feats in those early years. But to us, in the late 60s, and new to town, the Rhodes Gallery seemed to present an impenetrable ivory tower of which the black-bearded, black-attired Frank McEwen was king; and the threshold of which one crossed only with trepidation. Most often the Courtauld Collection of British and European paintings would be found displayed, and the Permanent Collection or the National Annual Exhibition... the one chance in the year for local artists to have work hung on those walls. Most of the 'Shona' sculpture was exported as exhibitions to Europe and America.

McEwen, out of a Western art background, was an authority in a cultural backwater; he was an expert among non-experts and he set high standards. The Annual Exhibition, during his tenure, was a prestigious event; it was then an honour to have work accepted, much more so than with the successor Heritage Exhibition of the present day. In addition to his promotion of 'Shona' sculpture, McEwen encouraged and collected a number of painters for the Permanent Collection — offhand they were Robert Paul, Thomas Mukarobgwa, Trevor Wood, Kingsley Sambo, Tom Maybank, Charles Fernandes, Robert Hunter-Craig, Tony Wales-Smith, Peter Birch, Marshall Baron (notably all males) and perhaps included Josephine O'Farrell and Anne Lowenstein, who were all older generation and painters of merit. McEwen showed work by some of these painters at the ICA Gallery in London early in the 60s, but by the end of the decade there seemed no way through for them... the West was clearly only interested in the 'Shona' sculpture. Who could be expected to support paintings either by colonial settler whites from a sanctioned country in Africa or by blacks who were painting in a contemporary rather than an ethnic manner, no matter how good they might be? (This attitude still persists today.) And so by the end of the 60s, many painters were disillusioned and discouraged. Peter Birch opened an art school. Maybank drifted to Johannesburg and took up brick-laying. Tony Wales-Smith concentrated on his architecture. Hunter-Craig emigrated to Majorca and, later, Trevor Wood to England. Charles Fernandes dropped out of the scene. Thomas Mukarobgwa abandoned his painting for the more popular stone sculpture. The only 60s painters of merit to gamely persist in their artistic quests were Marshall Baron until his untimely demise in 1974, Kingsley Sambo always struggling financially and getting drunk in desperation until his sudden death in the late 70s — shot, I heard, by guerrillas — and Robert Paul until his death in 1980. Perhaps not so strangely, these are the three painters of the 60s whose work is today most cherished and stands the test of time.

But I have digressed, and to return to the state of the art: there was the Rhodes Gallery, the apex, but there was little art organisational structure beneath the top of this pyramid. There were small voluntary art organisations and societies but there were no art schools or other exhibition galleries to talk about. McEwen had power and he exercised his power — his love and joy was the 'Shona' sculpture and he seemed to delight in chastising amateur white painters, justifiably sometimes, deriding them for their jacaranda and msasa landscapes. There was the odd cause for glee amongst this amateur element when, for example, McEwen raved about an abstract painting and then the artist (I think it was Neil Park), disclosed to the press that he had turned the canvas on a potter's wheel and poured the paint on — then McEwen and modern art were derided by the conservative whites.

In the early 70s, the country headed into the guerrilla war, known either as an anti-terrorist campaign or the War of Liberation, depending what colour or what side one was on or forced to be on... But of course, life went on and so did art. The black sculptors under the watchful eye of Frank McEwen at Vukutu and the Rhodes Gallery were still busy; so too were those at Tengenenge where the erst-while tobacco farmer, Tom Blomefield, had established a sculpture community in 1965, which McEwen, probably much to his chagrin, could not control absolutely. But for the painters, black and white, there was no protective umbrella. McEwen offered only the Annual. The city was without alternative exhibition spaces. Oh, there was in existence then the Cape Galleries selling jacaranda and msasa landscapes. Richard Rennie opened a framing concern and displayed popular paintings too. Roy Guthrie opened a small gallery which he called African Art Promotions, which was managed by the Chilean Arturo Lorrondo who had a good eye, and collected and exhibited works by Kingsley Sambo, and mostly sculpture by Nicholas Mukomberanwa, the Mteki brothers, Joseph Ndandarika and a few others. Tom Blomefield took a room at Meikles Hotel for his Tengenenge sculpture and later moved to a house in Park Street opposite African Art Promotions. But none of these places were

spaces suitable or available for painting exhibitions of any size. So bad was this lack of exhibition space that Helen Lieros, in 1968, went to The Antique Shop in a very old building at the corner of Third Street and Baker Avenue to hang her first exhibition in the city; and the next time, in 1971, again to The Antique Shop which had moved to Africa House in Stanley Avenue; the only other alternative was the top floor of the general store, HM Barbour's, which she used on another occasion in the early 70s. Other painters likewise sought out other temporary spaces. There was no hope of entry to the Rhodes Gallery. In about 1972, Eden Simon, a farmer, made a brave effort, assisted by Leslie McKenzie and Liza Bakewell, and opened a three or four roomed space called Tara Arts on the first floor of Berkely Buildings, where Joseph Muli, the Kenyan carver and Peter Gladman, the landscape painter shared a studio. It was a nice space. This solved the problem for a year or two but unfortunately the venture was beset with financial problems; there were no backers and it closed quietly. It was back to the beginning and the country was at war.

It seemed apparent to the younger unrecognised artists including painters and sculptors who were not 'Shona' sculptors, that it was a dead end. And let me stress that most of the artists who were being ignored were the whites who were actually in the majority as painters, most of the blacks having taken exclusively to sculpture; and this in a country on which criticism was poured for inhibiting the development of black art. There was a great deal of frustration caused by the lack of interest shown by McEwen, the Rhodes Gallery and the press. But there was no antagonism amongst the painters and the sculptors, black and white, who got along well, with mutual admiration for each other because there was no personal competition — they were artistic parallels — but the painters needed more exposure than they were getting.

At the end of 1972, Helen Lieros and I were instrumental in organising a group which became known as 'Circle'. The founder members comprised, as far as I can recall,

Arthur Azevedo,
Babette Fitzgerald,
Pauline Battigelli,
Lesley Honeyman,
Anne Lindsell-Stewart,
Trevor Wood, Marian
Arnold, Janine
Mackenzie, Mercia
Desmond, Helen Lieros
and myself. Later Joe
Muli, Bernard
Takawira, Henry
Thompson and a few
others were to join.

The intent was to create a voice to challenge the state of the art of the country, and the press.

Most often we met at our flat in Burlington House in Fife Avenue where we had some say amongst ourselves, let off steam and pondered what to do and how to make a promotion. It was all very amateur but there was a lot of energy and our meetings were enjoyable. In early 1974, when the country was in the grip of sanctions and armed conflict, Circle was so bold, under the chairmanship of Ian Honeyman, as to organise a major exhibition of its members' work at an exhibition hall at the Salisbury Showgrounds. This event prompted sharp criticism from Peter Birch, a painter of the 60s and an ex-boxer, who put on his gloves again and took Circle to task, in the pages of the *Sunday Mail*, for their presumptuousness. Notwithstanding this however, or perhaps because of it — any publicity can be useful — the exhibition, surprisingly, drew a lot of people, some 5000, and it was successful. It would be interesting to look at that work again, if it



**Artists meeting at
Gallery Delta c. 1975**

were possible, 20 years later... it may not have been as good as I remember... but it was a start. Sylvia Beck, administrator of the Rhodes Gallery, came to look and purchased work for the Permanent Collection. We had made a small impact and to some degree justified our contention that there was ART being made other than amateur painting and 'Shona' sculpture. But what else could be done? One isolated exhibition was not going to change the world. What more was there to do?

I have tried in the foregoing to set the art scene as it was then, as it seemed to me. And now something about myself, if I am to be absolutely honest, and which I seek to be despite all. Concurrent with the period I have been endeavouring to describe, and perhaps symptomatic of the immensely difficult times — the war, sanctions, the politics, which I felt acutely — I underwent deep personal unhappiness in my own state of being, with who I was in all my complexities and inhibitions, about my work and my life, its seeming purposelessness, and I knew endless anxiety and despair. I considered ending it all. Let me try to explain. When I married an artist I discovered how immensely absorbing the artistic quest is and an empathy with the artists and their difficulties grew gently and steadily over the years. Good God, I was married to one whose creative ability, will and dedication I believed in. Less than that would have meant a parting of the ways. In my work, I was in despair at encountering constantly what I saw and felt to be the destructive side of life... people in trouble, in difficulties; the complainants and the accused, black and white; lives in jeopardy or broken... the policeman's lot. I was with the Homicide Squad and in addition to the daily round in the city, there were the patrols to the bush where one carried one's rifle and played at war. Consequently, I envied the artists their creativity and work which was to me, in the scale of vocations, somewhere near the top if still beneath the spiritual one. Mine seemed to be much further down the scale. But one carried on, keeping up the front, while the inner man was in dilemma and despair. There was nobody to turn to. I resisted for a long time the call of a small intuitive voice but in the end, in late 1974, after years of searching and summoning courage, humbled myself and called on God to forgive me, to help me and guide me. My cry was heard and I discovered the existence of God. My burden was lifted and discovering hope and faith I walked in a new, open and perceptive way and prepared for the promptings and the opportunity to change my life. When a man has called upon God for help and he has been helped that man can no longer deny God. And that is why I write these words.

There were two options that I had had in mind for a long time: one was to write — a hankering from the early 20s when I knew we were all living day to day history in a watershed time and all that was needed was to write it down — or alternatively to somehow involve myself in the arts *or to open a gallery*. And therein lies the story.

And so it was, one day in November 1974, walking along Manica Road, on an impulse I went along the passage of Strachan's Buildings to the courtyard within. It was the first time that I had been there and I instantly liked its charm and quaintness. I looked over a stable door and spoke to a person inside who was packing his belongings. He said in response to my enquiry that the rooms were available for rent. *Within an hour or two*

I had secured the space and I returned to my office and tendered my resignation that afternoon. I was to leave my job within two months and to open a gallery soon thereafter. Outwardly, it was as easy as that, but, having obtained the space and made the decision to abandon security, the doubts were soon to come crowding in like a swarm of flies around my head. How could a tiny gallery that was to promote contemporary painting in the down-town streets of Salisbury in the middle of a war make sufficient income to

pay its way let alone sustain a family? But the die was cast, the decision made and, with a small gratuity to use as capital, *I set about preparing the space for use as a gallery.*

It was an exciting time but a scary one also. The first artist I ever approached and asked to show with me, other than my wife, was Arthur Azevedo, a close and dear friend to this day and who still shows with us. Things were changing rapidly and I learned to do things intuitively and fearlessly — if it feels right, do it. I applied for a job because I needed one to sustain the gallery before I ever opened it such was the financial prognosis for a private gallery in those times... but my reckoning was to do it because I needed change. And in doing so, to make an early start, to be operational and experienced for political change when it came, because after all, despite fears to the contrary, it might be all right in the end and we whites might be permitted and want to stay. Surprisingly I got the post I applied for as Chief Executive Officer of the National Arts

Foundation of Rhodesia. *So we opened Gallery Delta on the 17th of April 1975* and I commenced employment with

the Arts Foundation on the 1st of May... I did not have one job in the arts, but two! Both needed to be built up and developed. I ran the Foundation by day and looked to the gallery by night and weekends. And so it went on until I left the Foundation in 1988 to make way for a new director and resorted to the gallery full-time in an effort to make it pay a modest wage.

In my schemings for a gallery, I deliberated long for a suitable name and I sought, with my philhelene affinities, the Greek connection rather than the African, and for something that was geometric for the logo. Thus the fourth letter of the Greek alphabet — *theta* — appealed. The letter is formed by a triangle which is a perfect shape, three parts forming one, like the Trinity. *The*

word 'delta' — the river

running through it and pouring outwards with connotations of movement and fertility — seemed appropriate also.

So we had a gallery at last, such as it was to begin with, comprising three small interleading rooms each measuring no more than 13 x 13 feet, in which we could mount an exhibition of 20 to 30 paintings and a few sculptures. The rooms were situated along one side of the inner courtyard which somebody had nostalgically dubbed Little Chelsea, probably because of the English bay window, with concentric blown circles in the glass, which set it off. It was a good place to keep people captive for an hour or two and they were forced, by its small size, to be communicative.

After a year or two, the four rooms on 'The Other Side' became available. Taking them over doubled our space and gave us more control of the courtyard. And we had a couple of rooms for storage on the first floor which was accessible by stairs and the cat-walk balcony. The other rooms around the balcony were occupied by small businesses — silk-screeners, tailors and cobblers — who collectively set up a constant din of voices, music, banging and hammering; the tread and pedal of the Singer sewing machines caused so much vibration through our ceilings that our lamps always blew before their scheduled life-times. And a multitude of scraps — paper and flock — would find its way and gather on the shanty tin



roof, in the gutters and down to the courtyard. But it was active and colourful and it became the home of the gallery for 16 years.

We opened with a show of graphics. Amongst the works were some by Philippe Grosclaude and Therese Houyoux of Geneva and it is poignant for us that the latter will visit Zimbabwe for the first time in July this year to conduct a one-person show. Such is the strength of artists' friendships. But why graphics involving foreign artists for the first show? Simply, we had a collection which was different and had standard, and because we wanted to promote the graphic as a legitimate artistic method... which is indicative of how backward we were 20 years ago, for while there were engravings by Rembrandt in the Rhodes Gallery, the buying public which comprised a tiny percentage of the white population, did not know the graphic nor its processes, imagining they were off the photo-litho press at the nearest commercial printers. And in our first year of operations we persisted with several graphic exhibitions, including a collection of contemporary Japanese graphics, to encourage artists at home to examine and practise these methods.

Having only a tiny space in an obscure, hidden venue, and intending to promote the best of contemporary art, there was no question of stocking a shop with a few souvenirs and curios and expecting visitors to flock in. There was a need to make Gallery Delta as vibrant and varied as possible... to get known quickly and to build an

interest. *Thus in the first year, from April to December, we mounted 12 exhibitions, which rather set the pattern for the*

future — a show every three or four weeks throughout the year, about 15 on average, but the number has been known to rise to as many as 20 events.

I can well remember the first exhibition, where specific works hung and who bought them. Fried Lutz and the late George Seirlis who became ardent supporters and collectors were there that night. I was very nervous and felt guilty that I had prevailed on all our friends and acquaintances to be there and imagined that they must have come out of sympathy. This was a feeling I had for a long time but which gradually turned into an acceptance that people really were interested and enjoyed attending to look at and collect art, and for the pleasure of meeting people. Our critics and sceptics said we were mad and would not last for six months. And so many times they were very nearly right! We were starting at the least popular end of the market, and at, as private galleries go, a nominal commission. We set the figure of 25% to be as kind to the artists as possible, but which is about half of that charged in Europe and America and which we have stubbornly maintained despite the fact that we have never been subsidised like the Rhodes Gallery which also charges the same commission.

The day to day minding of the gallery was taken over by Helen's father, Paul Apostolos Lieros, whose oft response to the query May we come in and look? was, If you have your cheque book with you. He was to help us until 1980 when at age 80 he died, almost a year to the day after being mugged along the passage of Strachan's Buildings on a Saturday afternoon. In the determined struggle he had overexerted his heart, and so we lost one of our own, or the gallery claimed one.

Gallery Delta had been established in an endeavour to provide a venue for the painters and the graphic, textile and ceramic artists, and those sculptors who were doing other than 'Shona' sculpture. And having made those decisions it was mainly white artists that we showed because they were the painters and artists in other mediums.

The black artists almost to a man had become carvers and sculptors of stone. It was in the stone that money and fame promised to be and was; and it was also a more readily available and less technical medium on which to work and which did not demand formal art training for which there were few facilities. And I think in retrospect that the success of the stone inhibited the development of painting by blacks, and for about thirty years.

When we came to consider who was left among the black painters of the 60s there were few of any merit. Thomas Mukarobgwa was into stone. Kingsley Sambo was still about and showing at African Art Promotions. Charles Fernandes I managed to find in the ghetto at Mbare where the inside of his tiny home was painted with murals and I managed to salvage an old canvas but of the artistic creativity of Charles there seemed little to resuscitate. Canon Ned Patterson of Cyrene of the 40s and 50s and subsequently Nyarutsetso at Mbare, had fostered talent but by 1974, of those prodigies, there was no trace. The Mzilikazi Art and Craft Centre at Bulawayo was stuck in the tradition of the early 60s with slick amateur Western type representational renderings of the life in the townships and country. In the first year we showed wood carvings by Joseph Muli and paintings by John Hlatywayo but inevitably our emphasis was with paintings by whites. We watched for signs of resurgence amongst the blacks and tried to encourage where we were able. Apart from some excursions here and there, it was slow to come...

Editor's note: The sequel to this article describing developments at Gallery Delta and in the local art scene over the 20 years will be published in a forthcoming issue of *Gallery*.



Andrew Curling

(above) Job Kekana in his studio at St Faith's Mission, Rusape, in January 1995

(opposite) Job Kekana, *Young Girl*, 1990, wood

Why is it that we do not appreciate what we have until we have lost it?
Job Kekana died on 10 March 1995.
Here, Pip Curling shares her last meeting with him

A gift that was hiding: Job Kekana

Afromosia, Job Kekana's favourite wood, is rather like he was; fine grained, true and warm hearted. I last saw Job in early January on a bleak overcast day in his small studio at St Faith's Mission near Rusape. The little room was crowded with drawings, books and the tools of his craft. A wheelchair stood at the door. On the shelf behind the wheelchair was Job's diploma from the John Cass School of Art in England. Next to the diploma, two photographs, one of the young Job with Sr Pauline, the Anglican nun who first recognised his talent, and the other taken at the National Gallery some time in the 60s. In this photograph, a Rodin sculpture is on a plinth and a drawing done by Job of the sculpture is displayed on an easel. Job is in the company of other sculptors of the time. I recognised Sam Songo and Henry Munyaradzi.

As he reminisced about his life and work, Job kept coming back to his close and ambiguous association with Sr Pauline. He met her at the mission where she taught outside Pietersburg in the Transvaal. Although not an artist herself, Sr Pauline was the daughter of a carpenter and had a knowledge and appreciation of fine wood. She gave Job the materials and tools he needed and she guided his work. Job recalled that: *"Art in South Africa at that time was a white man's job. Africans must make sticks for stirring pots."*

It was because of this, Job claimed, that Sr Pauline exhibited his sculpture under her name as her own work. When the work sold she gave Job *"... a few pennies as a reward... But, she was taking something from me while she was giving me something. She gave me a gift that was hiding in myself... In life the ones who are clever live on those who are stupid."*

In 1944 Sr Pauline was transferred to St Faith's Mission. She arranged for Job to follow her. At that time black South Africans were not eligible for passports so Job came to Rhodesia on a travel document with a permit to work only at St Faith's. Nine years later, disgruntled with the feeling that Sr Pauline was exploiting him, Job left St Faith's to work independently in Rusape. He quickly fell foul of the immigration officials and had to return to the mission or face deportation. Then came a commission to carve the mace for the Rhodesian parliament and after that Job was awarded citizenship. *"The first thing I did was get a passport... I went to England and tried for a job sweeping floors in art schools... I went to see how people carved, how long it took others to make a carving. You need to measure yourself by other people."*

John Cass School gave Job a place as a full-time student. After completing a three year diploma he was offered a teaching post at the school, but Job chose to return to live and work at St Faith's. He did, however, visit Italy where he marvelled at Michelangelo's David. He said: *"When you travel between people it makes your knowledge stronger."*

Among his many commissions, Job remembered only a few. He fondly recalled a small bust of a mother and child bought by Ben Gingell and given to the people of Iona, Scotland, in memory of southern African soldiers who fought in the Second World War. His commitment to art overrode his own religious and political beliefs. He carved the coat of arms for the post-UDI Rhodesian government and he made religious works for the Catholic as well as the Anglican church. Job recalled that the priest at Monte Casino Catholic Mission, Macheke, *"... had everything from Rome removed and asked me to carve an African crucifix and a statue of the Virgin Mary. During the war the boys broke everything and they took Mary. After the war was over I made more."*

Job was particularly proud of some of his most recent work: the two busts of Nelson Mandela and the staff he carved for Archbishop Desmond Tutu. The latter was made in three parts from orange wood and jointed with copper. It symbolises the Holy Trinity. *"Everything you make must mean something."*

Harare residents can see a fine example of Job's work at the Anglican Cathedral. His is the large crucifix suspended over the altar. Disappointed that his work had never been acknowledged by the art community in his adopted country, Job donated two works to the National Gallery. One is titled *Sorcerer* and the other, *Abstract*. I asked Job how he felt about abstraction. He replied: *"Abstract art, I like it but it is a funny thing just to please some imagining of the mind. Art should be for teaching the children and reminding them of old traditions."*

I wondered why he had never gone back to South Africa. He said: *"It is better for me to stay here. I get a lot of work for South Africa because there they know you better when you are on the edge."*

I left Job working on two small standing naked female figures. One a pregnant woman and the other a mother breast-feeding her baby. These were commissioned by a British gynaecologist whose father had once been a teacher at St Faith's.

The church at St Faith's is one of the oldest in the country. Its crumbling red brick Romanesque structure nestles behind huge gum trees as old as itself. The interior is a bitter disappointment. A piece of monstrously ugly darkwood Victorian furniture behind the altar houses reproductions of sentimental nineteenth century holy scenes. The nave is dominated by a cement cast of what might be St George. A fishmoth-nibbled Victorian print hangs crookedly beside the north door. Dusty stations of the cross, carved by some of Job's pupils, lean drunkenly out of sight on the tops of aisle pillars. Nowhere is there evidence that, for fifty years, there lived and worked at this mission one of the finest sculptors of religious art in southern Africa.



and...

Elizabeth Rankin, professor of art history at Wits University who has done extensive research on wood sculptors of southern Africa, writes about his work

Living and working in the mission tradition: *in memoriam* Job Kekana

At mission schools in South Africa it was customary to offer woodwork as practical training for boys alongside their school lessons. But from the 1920s at the Grace Dieu Anglican Mission near Pietersburg, this took on a special significance. Through the initiative of Fr Edward Paterson and the dedication of the teacher in charge of the workshop, Sr Pauline CR, the carpentry school also encouraged carving skills. This school was to foster the talents of Job Kekana, born near Potgietersrus in 1916, whose time there, from 1933 to 1939, shaped the direction of his career and his carving — and was still evident in his work at the time of his death.

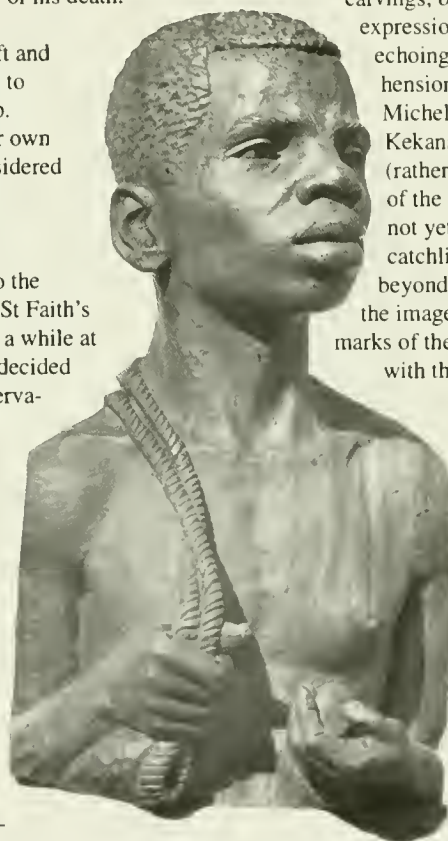
The focus of the carving school was on craft and manual skills, chiefly relief carving applied to church furniture made in the carpentry shop. Students were not expected to develop their own designs, as members of the order were considered better fitted to conceive religious imagery appropriately.

When around 1938 Sr Pauline was called to the mother house in Grahamstown and later to St Faith's in Rusape, Rhodesia, Kekana stayed on for a while at Grace Dieu to assist with training but then decided to try his fortune in Johannesburg. Job reservation at the time restricted his opportunities in carving for furniture manufacture and, without the resources of the mission, he had difficulty marketing his work. So in 1944, he took up Sr Pauline's suggestion that he join her at St Faith's. Kekana undertook important commissions during the 1940s including the panels for the pulpit in St Mary's Cathedral, Johannesburg. Such works continued to draw on established church traditions, so that they are not recognisable as African carvings in style or subject matter. When asked about this, Kekana explained that he understood Christ as a white person historically and so depicted him thus — unless specifically asked to do otherwise. For example, he gave African features to his Christ for St Mary and All Saints in Harare in 1986 at the request of the American priest who commissioned the crucifix. But often Kekana interpreted lesser religious figures in a more personal way, in terms of his own experience. Although dressed in dignified Gothic robes, his Madonnas frequently have tender African features, as do the babies they bear. A number of these found their way into British church collections after Kekana's successful exhibitions during his stay in England in the 1960s.

When he travelled overseas he was able to see important works by sculptors like Rodin and Michelangelo, and particularly admired the English carver, Grinling Gibbons. But for Kekana his most important experience abroad was the opportunity to attend classes at the John Cass College in London, particularly to draw and model

from life. Although Kekana chose to return to Africa in 1964 to set up a school for carvers in Rusape, his English experiences continued to inform his teaching and his work.

Life drawing was an important part of classes at his school, and his own carving benefited from these studies. For example, his half-length figure of David from the Old Testament was modelled on one of his own students, 14 year old David Tsungu. The head has a personal quality and a more convincing naturalism than earlier carvings, both in underlying structure and in the nuances of expression. *David Saviour* is a moving psychological study, echoing in his African features the same sense of apprehension yet steadfast purpose that informed Michelangelo's monumental image of the young hero. Kekana included the hands holding the sling and stone (rather small in scale, probably because of the limitations of the block of wood) to show the viewer that Goliath has not yet been slain. David's eyes, their focus defined by a catchlight left against the dark, carved-out pupils, gaze beyond us at his adversary. The sense of life that invests the image is echoed in the carving style, animated by the marks of the chisel which create a subtle texture, interacting with the light on the surface.



Kekana's work remained consistent in style and quality to the end of his long career, both in religious images and an increasing number of secular works. Occasionally he carved portraits, which display his powers of observation and able characterisation. Many of Kekana's carved heads represented 'African types' which, in the context of the African art market, may sound ominously like the ubiquitous clichéd images made for the tourist trade. However, Kekana avoided stereotypes and these carvings at their best are not only very fine technically, but invested with sensitive individuality, like the beauty and gentle charm of *Young Girl*, carved in 1990.

The value of Kekana's carvings has been overlooked because they displayed neither the lively, sometimes crude, stylisation of representation that is admired in contemporary rural art, nor the sophisticated experimentation of urban modernism. But his work should surely be evaluated in terms of the religious tradition within which he was working, and for which the accessibility of his art is so well suited. The sustained high quality of Kekana's carving and the integrity of his subject matter deserve a level of recognition that they have yet to receive either in his adoptive country or the country of his birth.

(above) Job Kekana,
David Saviour,
c. 1964, afromosia

Helen Lieros, *Helen's Horse* (detail),
1994, 86 x 61cm, ink and collage on paper



Helen Lieros

Born in Zimbabwe of Greek parents, Helen Lieros with her outspoken, effervescent personality is one of the most influential artists working in Zimbabwe. In this interview with Barbara Murray, she talks about her life and work

BM: You have three major influences in your life, the Greek, the African and the Swiss. How are they intermeshed in you and expressed in your work?

HL: I think basically the main emphasis in my life is to be able to find out who I am and what I am about. Geneva was really about exploration, to find out what art was. Because from Gweru, what was art? It was pretty little landscapes and so on, that was really suffocating as a little girl. So to go to Switzerland and to discover Braque, to meet him at his last exhibition, to realise what a weird guy this was. Why was he sticking things on? Being there, I was forced to paint like a Swiss. Like I put a red, I'll never forget, and the professor would make me cross-hatch grey over it to kill the red. And I would try to say, but sir in my country we've got red. We've got red trees, red earth. Or we've got a very strong blue. Why do I have to put a grey over this deep blue? And again you had to sort of go by the wayside because you knew that you had to work to get a good mark to get through so you could go on to the second year. I look back on my studies and I feel good in that I learned the roots, the basic roots, of drawing etc. which I have used right throughout my whole life but I had no identity. I was like another moo cow with a big stamp on it when I finished. But it was an exploration.

BM: And the Greek influence? You grew up in a very Greek household, speaking Greek...

HL: Yes, it was the first language that I learnt. And when I was studying in Switzerland, my parents never had money for me to be able to come home for my holidays so I went to Greece which gave me the opportunity to discover my roots. My whole being was on the old ancient Greece, the civilisation and all the magnificent art, the Cycladic, the Byzantine.

BM: And then you came back to Africa?

HL: Yes, then I came home and all of a sudden I realised that I came from a most beautiful country, that I had never really seen. Although I think it was inside me all the time... wanting to use the brighter colours... and I battled for 10 years trying to find who, what I am, to identify with the colour and spirit of Africa. When I was in Greece I had sketched the Greek peasants, the women, with their dooks, always dressed in black. And when I came home I saw the African peasants, the tsoro players, the newspaper sellers. The creative element and the myth came in. The texture, the land, the people, everything played a very important part in my life. Then the war

came, the sanctions, no materials, and for me I think that '74 was the time when I really started creating... as late as that... when I explored and I improvised and I got hooked on trying to make materials and work with the materials that I was alien to.

BM: When you set out to do a work, do you have a subject in mind, some event, some emotion?

HL: I don't think I know consciously. I think it is very much a subconscious process.

BM: Is it inspiration?

HL: I don't believe in inspiration. I think inspiration, if you want to use that word, only comes when you have worked and worked and worked. It is the accumulation of the work and the ideas, the problems that you have been facing. You are in search of that thing which occupies you. There are things you feel you've got to get out. And there's times when your mind is blank and then this is when you start exploring again. I find maybe my colours are becoming boring and I get all my bits and pieces and I feel that I need to find something else to work. It's a preliminary search into something new, something else... whatever is coming. I think that my biggest fear in my life is to be repetitive. I would rather stop painting entirely because I feel that you have to explore. I remember an old professor of mine saying if you have a standstill period rather go one step backward so that you can go forward. My step backward is to go back to drawing, back to just sketching and rethinking. I enjoy working with drawings. I find it's like people who sit down and write diaries. For me, my diary is all those sketches that I do. There's no words. It's the images that portray what I feel.

BM: And you sketch what's around you?

HL: No, it's what comes from my heart, my mind, and my soul. Things that disturb me; things that make me happy.

BM: So you don't look for outside subjects like nature or landscape?

HL: They all stand in my mind but very rarely do I work from nature. I might just do a contour line that has everything that I want. The organic, the texture is very strong in what I look at. I love the positive / negative shapes and the textural qualities.

BM: The texture has always been very strong in your work, even in your graphics... the acid eating, then the layers of paint, papers, the collage... when did you start doing collage?

HL: '74 / '75 was my collage. It stemmed from all the work which was unsuccessful which I kept in boxes. I started using my own pieces within a painting. Also at that time, it makes me laugh now when I think of it, our paper was in very very small sizes and I wanted to work large so therefore I went and stuck two pieces of paper together and then added collage so that it looked like a larger piece of work. But then I have a psychological hatred, again very personal, of using other people's images in my painting, like magazines or photographs, unless I have taken the photograph, unless I have gone through the process. It has always got to be part of me. I don't like taking from anybody else. Sometimes I'm biased if you want, but I feel it's not ethical and I think this is what is happening in art. This ethical part is being destroyed. There's no ethics in a lot of things that are happening today.

BM: A lot of people take pieces from around their environment and put it together and say this is a work of art.

HL: Yes, but we can take Schwitters for example. I just love his work. Every little piece was his trip by bus, taxi or whatever. And the way he put it together. So again that was like a personal

collection. And people may have a mania of collecting toothbrushes, so I mean, what a wonderful painting you can make of it — a piece of art from toothbrushes because it's part of you. Also there have been artists that have used other artists' work. Like Picasso, who literally copied Manet's *Dejeuner sur l'herbe*, but what came out of that? What did Picasso do from that? It was something totally different. He'd used the composition, that I think is wonderful because at the same time he was paying tribute to a master. That I understand. But I'm saying I feel there is a deadline to anything you do. And my deadline is to use personal, preferably my own, pieces for collage.

BM: You mention Picasso going back and looking at Manet. Have there been any artists that have made a very strong impression on you, that have been influential, used as a jumping off point?

HL: One person who had a great influence over me in my youth was Kokoschka. I loved Kokoschka's feeling in his work and somehow I think I related him to Africa, though it had nothing to do with Africa. Another artist who had a very strong influence on my work when I first came back home was Daumier; the political things, the black and white, the people, and again maybe at that time I was very attached to the peasants, the people, and the society and the political possibilities. Daumier and Kokoschka were at that time the strongest influences in my work.

BM: It is interesting that you chose Kokoschka because his work has a strong sense of inner turmoil, and to me, much of your work is expressive of storms, violence, turmoil.

HL: Maybe that's the Greek part of me coming out. Probably the drama. I feel that the biggest thing in my life is to try and be an individual and try and identify who I really am. It is a battle in my life, in my work, this identity. Am I Greek? Am I African? And yet there is a link in the superstitions of the Greek and of the African. The relationship is very similar in many, many ways. And to be accepted as a Greek or as a white African... I feel this has been really my biggest fight. I go to Greece and I enjoy it but I don't think I'm part of that. And in Switzerland... I find a peace there. I find a tranquil quality that I've always enjoyed immensely, and maybe recapturing my youth. But because I'm very sort of aggressive or... I always feel I need the opposite to calm the situation and give it a good balance. But I think my work is based on this fight between who and what I am.

BM: Your work is not concerned with material reality, is it rather an imaginative psychological reconstruction?

HL: Possibly, yes. Human forms have always been a prominent feature in my work, whether symbolic or figurative, losing their everyday appearance and individuality and assuming a degree of anonymity and stylisation of shape. Their origins come from my love of the Byzantine stylisation and spirituality and even further back and beyond, the Cycladic, and linking forward to the African stylisation. The simplicity of form. I have analysed the anatomy, the character, and then it's a breakaway to minimalise and just to use the bare essentials of what is the human figure, what he represents. Symbolism. I think the symbolic quality has a large part in my work... the symbolism of what the human being is or what he represents, and what the painting is about.

BM: What have been the major themes in your work?

HL: I think it was the earth, the discovery of Africa, the stratas, the land formation was very strong. Mysticism, ritual, the strong symbolic force of form and shape, always with a human element, occur again and again. Man taking over in the space and becoming the patriarch, the ruler. That again, for me, had a lot to do with the war. So much killing. Brother killing brother. The whole turbulence. And the bird came into that. It was not the bird of peace, for

which we were all hoping, but it became like a war bird. Then after independence, it was the rise of the *jongwe*. Again the bird, the cock, the symbol of the party that had won. And there was peace.

Then everything was around my sister, her illness. There were two or three years when my work was based on the two sisters. It was very much against the doctors, a hatred, a bitterness that her life couldn't be saved. She, for me, was the most precious thing in my life. The two of us were very close. It became very expressionistic, although the media somehow, oil on paper, was quite soft, but the work was violent.

And then after that was the search for my identity which I think has carried on till now. Who am I? Images from Greek sculpture... torsos appeared, always enclosed in glass cases as if in a museum with prominent figures, African forms outside, *The Artist Viewed Through a Glass Case*.

BM: Which of your recent paintings do you feel are successful?

HL: One of the good paintings I find is my *Lobola*. There is a wedding, a woman, black and white.

BM: What were you thinking of when you painted *Lobola*?

HL: After my mother died that's the book closed. My parents' whole life history had been so beautiful and so tragic and traumatic. My father came to Africa because he was shipwrecked in Cape Town. He was one of the survivors and he was waiting for a boat to come and pick him up. He was in the merchant navy. And somebody said why don't you come up to Rhodesia and visit the country while you wait for your boat. And he came here and he just went crazy about this country. He was always searching to find a country where he wasn't an alien. My father travelled all over the world, so he was not a Greek, more a cosmopolitan in that sense. And that's how he came to Africa. So what I did, subconsciously, was like a diary. All the work that I've done through this whole year has been a diary. With the Greeks as with the Africans, you have a dowry and you get married. The dowry in Greek is *proika*. In Shona it's *lobola*. So that figure represents the bride, the woman who came. But it also represents Africa, the *lobola*, so there is an interlink throughout all the work, an intermingling. Just before my Mom died she wanted to go to Greece, for the Easter, and I saw again the symbolism of the goat and the fast. The goat to me is a very precious thing because in Gweru there was always the goat around. So there is the African goat and the Greek goat. All my work is interlinked

between Greece and Africa, where there is such a similarity, and it is virtually based on all that has happened. So it's a diary of my land that I was born in, that I love, and what I have inherited from my parents.

BM: Ritual, sacrifice, tradition, the goat, all play a large part in both African and Greek myth. What you identify with in the African culture are those same elements that appear in the Greek culture... a kind of universal symbolism?

HL: Exactly.

BM: Myth could be described as "the soul's need for placing itself in the vast scheme of things." Why do you emphasise myth when you talk about art?



Helen Lieros, *Icon*, 1994,
61 x 43cm, ink on paper

(opposite) Helen Lleros, *The Red String*, 1991, 118 x 128cm, mixed media

(below) Helen Lleros, *Heterogeneous* (detail of triptych), 1995, 102 x 92 x 36cm, glypto mixed media



HL: Because myth is something that is left behind somehow nowadays. The machine, science, technology, the rational and intellectual have taken over. But for the human, myth is very important. It has always intrigued me. Africa is for me a land in which the myth is so strong and yet we don't seem to look at it. It seems to be becoming irrelevant. And myth is the so-called 'exotic' element that the European is trying to find again... the spirits. In reality, it is the myth that counts so much. Aesop's fables and the symbolism, that intrigues me. In the ancient Greek theatre, it's the human spirit turned into drama.

BM: You recently went down to mount the Zimbabwe exhibition at the Joburg Biennale. How did the work from Europe, USA etc, on the Biennale strike you?

HL: I didn't see any paintings! There was technology, photo montages, photographs. There was really no painting, the manipulation of the paint, the power of putting those brush strokes on... there was none of that. So maybe painting is out, in a sense, out of fashion or whatever. Things that excited me were the Angolan artists, the Benin artists, the Hungarians with their sensitive work. Most of the work that I really responded to was sculpture or installation. There was no painting about which I could say, God that was fantastic! Like when you go to Europe and you go to an exhibition of maybe even an unknown artist, you go in there and it knocks you back, as a painting.

BM: Does that make you feel that you want to try other mediums?

HL: Ah, I'm a painter. I mean I've always tried other mediums. I've loved etching. I've worked with relief. I love paper. I've been recycling, making paper and I'm going back here, in a way, to the creation of my *Lucky Bean Tree* where I moulded the paper in relief forms and embossed it. This has been going on for ten years, in my studio. Before I was doing these moulds and I had never been able to put them together. Now I've gone back again, making more of these moulds, and I just hope that something will come out of this.

BM: In a general sense, I would say that much of the work on the Biennale wasn't very concerned with colour.

HL: No, there was very little colour.

BM: And that's an important element of your work.

HL: Oh, very! I mean colour is the light of life. I respond to colour so strongly. It has so much to do with my whole world, the reaction. I mean there could be a black painting but how much of that black is black and how many other colours do you use to make that black? It could be a blue black, red black, mauve black, green black, grey black. It's not just black. It's what you put into it to try and get that black. And I think my preoccupation with colour is far too strong to just push it on the side. When I came home to Africa it was the colours that influenced me more than anything. As I began to re-identify myself with the African environment so my painting became broader and my colour stronger, symbolic of the felt experience. Colour for me has become an emotional translation of visual material. I use pure saturated colours in rich harmonies of warm and cold hues related to the heat and light of Africa, trying to radiate their force and vibrance. And texture is integrated with colour. Who knows, maybe colour and painting might



come back. Most of the work, even in Germany when I went, was installation and again very colourless as well. But there were paintings. There were the masters. And I feel what is probably happening is that the masters did such wonderful work that we cannot even touch them. Because we will never be Picassos... there are no more Picassos... no more Matisse. So basically, psychologically, I think everybody is trying to find another dimension and colour is not important to them. Overseas mechanical things are important, the gadgets, the videos, the lasers, this kind of thing. I am not interested in the computers and the gadgets.

BM: So you have no desire to use a computer then?

HL: Never! But if I used a computer I would probably tear up what came out and use it as a collage so it would only be part.

BM: How important was your trip to Germany?

HL: It was very important. It gave me an insight into how we are here in Zimbabwe in comparison to what is happening elsewhere. I need to see art, exhibitions and interchange with artists to analyse myself and my work. We are isolated here. We achieve much by this isolation because outside influences, movements and trends do

not affect us so much and yet we have to see them to balance where we are. This stimulus helps us to go forward on our own path and challenges us to dare.

BM: One of your big involvements locally has been in teaching...

HL: Teaching is important in a sense that I kept up with times, with the young generation, with their thought, and helped them to express themselves. Some of my students come from very conservative backgrounds and you introduce them to things they hadn't seen or didn't know about, hadn't thought about. You bring out Soutine and Picasso, Kokoschka, and you open a new door into what people were trying to say. My involvement also has been with teachers from the rural areas who have been trying to find ways and means of being able to have an art club and also provoke thought with their students and again finding ways to improvise, saying let's work on newspaper, with mud, the making of brushes. I find it stimulating and I like young people, I find them very exciting. With the young generation of our black painters there is so much that is happening now, and I would rather spend my time in trying to help those who are producing something different. The different is what I'm looking for.

BM: What do you find particularly interesting in the current art scene here?

HL: I think it's very exciting. Don't forget that it's been stone, stone, stone, and now people are exploring colour and again the way they're moving from something that is very figurative, very realistic, and breaking it up and exploring the space and finding something more. Okay, you have a common factor that it is very much of a socio-subject, like coming from Zengeza to town and the folk that are ploughing the land. That is normal. But what happens to those... again the fragmentation, sometimes breaking it up and making it into maybe an abstract... or the symbolism that is coming out in the work. They are exploring the media, again the improvisation of what they can get and what comes out of it. That's what art is all about... the creativity that is coming out.

BM: Music has been very important in your life, how does it interlink with painting? How do you see the two art forms?

HL: For me they're so close that it is just unbelievable. With sound and harmony, orchestral, there is so much colour. The ups and downs, the drama, the peacefulness, the water. I feel that sound has so much to do in my life, in my subconscious world with colour. Music and painting, for me, are so interrelated. Even when I was little and I was playing the piano, I would see colours. My teacher would say... what, how are you playing? and I'd say, I see green... and that's a red note. No, she would say, that's a black note. And I would say, no that's a red note, because there was a harsh quality in that note. So my work is very much related to sound, always has been.

BM: I think of your paintings and music as having a greater involvement in the intuitive, subconscious kind of understanding and response to life. It isn't the ideas so much as the feelings that are involved in life that you are painting about.

HL: Yes, that's what I'm searching for. So sometimes even if my work is static, if I hear a sound or listen to a beautiful orchestral symphony, it speaks to me, it helps me.

BM: What about religion and the spiritual? You have done a lot of paintings of subjects like Easter, marriage...

HL: We were talking about old artists like El Greco who were iconographic, and I love icons, the static, the glow and the colours... I think they have played a big part in my painting. The Easter ceremony is very beautiful in the Greek church. It's not just the spiritual, it's the whole procession, the symbolism... I think it's the symbolism in religion, and the way it has been retained. Living here, there is a lot. I didn't find it so much when I went back to Greece with my mother. I felt that it had lost that spiritual... become very

commercial. So I'm not an over-religious person but I love the symbols, the candles, the rise... there is a warmth in there that sort of recharges all those batteries, spiritually, that have just disintegrated through the year. So for me, Easter is very special.

BM: When you're talking about religion, I feel you are seeing it as a celebration of life...

HL: Yes, for Easter, it is. If you see it, feel it... it is so special. It gives you an insight. We are living but we don't look within ourselves, and I think Easter is a time when you look within yourself and try to find out how you tick and what it is all about. Even the fast... It cleanses you out and makes you more alert, makes you think on a higher level, makes you more aware, and makes you search within yourself. Out of my Greek, that is one thing I have retained, and Easter is one time that I find very special. *Kristos anesti*, Christ has risen. It is rising, and you want to rise inside you. It's very beautiful.



Stoffer Geiling

Helen Lieros, *Sacrificial Goats*, 1994, 61 x 43cm, ink on paper

Letters



Mary Davies, *Giants and the Lone Woolf*, 1994, mixed media

Dear Editor

It was with amazement followed by frustration that I read your comments referring to the lack of a local school of art (*Gallery* no 2). Two art schools *already* exist in Zimbabwe. For some extraordinary reason this fact is largely ignored by the local art community. Your comments in relation to the following facts would be appreciated.

1. The Harare Polytechnic Art School opened in 1980. Its average intake is 20 students per year most of whom graduated in the early years with a London City & Guilds Diploma in Design for print and latterly, a National Diploma in either Fine Art or Design for Print.
2. In excess of 200 students have been trained by us. Many of them hold senior positions in advertising agencies, design studios and publishing houses. Many are self employed, some teaching in secondary schools. A large number have exhibited their work at Gallery Delta. Others have travelled abroad pursuing their careers successfully.
3. Our present lecturer in charge is an ex-student who runs the Department extremely efficiently. Other members of staff include well known local artists. We are fortunate to have two expatriate lecturers on our full-time staff as well as numerous part-time teachers ensuring a full well-balanced training.
4. At a recent exhibition at Gallery Delta several of the exhibiting artists were our students. This fact was ignored in the reviews.
5. At the recent Graphic Artists of Zimbabwe Association exhibition half of the artists were either our graduates or members of staff.

While we acknowledge that the Fine Art option has only been available for the past four years, it is difficult to understand why it is totally ignored. I fail to comprehend why, instead of offering encouragement and support to an institution with a proven track record, the art community continues to yearn for another Zimbabwe School of Art. It would be interesting to know how much

money has already been spent on 'feasibility studies' and such-like for this project which shows no signs of ever becoming a reality. It is frustrating for the staff and students at the Poly to observe this waste when we know that even a small portion of this money could have been used to improve our woefully inadequate facilities. We are fortunate to be adequately staffed with qualified, competent, enthusiastic and dedicated staff - what we need is recognition and support!

Dianne Deudney

Editor's comment:

'Diplomas' not degrees; 'woefully inadequate facilities'; 'local artists' as teachers; plus only one group of Fine Art diploma students whose work *has* been exhibited at Delta; these are some of the very reasons for the attempt, which began before the Poly offered the Fine Art option, to get funding for a fully recognised School of Art with degree status. Many of the Poly lecturers have had the benefit of training for a degree in Fine Art. Why should Zimbabwe's students be denied such an opportunity? There is certainly room for argument that the new School of Art could be developed from the Polytechnic Department. What is needed is a comprehensive plan for such a project - another feasibility study? Can the Poly offer one? Such studies are essential to persuade donors to support projects. Yes, a lot of money has been spent and we can only hope that it has not been wasted. However, it was extremely disturbing to read in *The Herald* recently that Professor Kahari, Director of the National Gallery, who is supposed to be leading the project, and who publicly declared (as did President Mugabe) at the 1994 Heritage opening, that he would ensure that this project went ahead within his tenure, now thinks the School should be set up in South Africa! They already have several universities and polys that offer good degree courses in Fine Art. We need one here. Were those heartening speeches just more empty rhetoric? Ironically, Professor Kahari has been invited to talk at a symposium in London later this year on the School! What will he say? Stephen Williams, former project manager/consultant SADC Region School of Art and Design Project, will reply, in *Gallery* no 5, to the above letter. Any other contributions to the debate would be welcome.

Dear Editor

I am an admirer of Pip Curling's ability to express herself, especially her article in *Review* in sorting out young African artists re realism. In reference to her interpretation of *Giants & the Lone Woolf* - I was very much affected when I read Malcolm Bradbury's book *10 Great Writers*. These ten helped usher in 'modernity' - more or less published between the World Wars. It was a break away from the Victorian era - the past. Such a collection of greats in one volume led me to have the ten photocopied. I wanted to pay homage.

To think all those great thoughts and ideas were constructed out of, using a common denominator - 26 letters of the alphabet (hence the alphabet at the bottom). The photocopies were neat-sized about 4 x 6. Cutting around the faces I got a key shape which I thought quite appropos - they were keys to a new approach to thinking. The negatives I chose to feel were the shapes of electric light bulbs - representing the readers as sentient beings receiving greatness (the dots inside the heads were 'hits').

Now these ten were all writers, not a politician nor a scientist in the lot (two playwrights) - Joyce, Kafka, TS Eliot, Conrad, Mann, Proust, Ibsen, Pirandello, Dostoevsky and Woolf. When the women artists thing came up, Woolf needed attention as it was nine to one, male to female. Needless to say I'm all in favour of interpretation but I also want to defend universal, eclectic thinking as opposed to feminist bias. I'm no scholar, just a deep appreciator of greatness. In awe,

Mary Davies

Reviews of recent work

Nicholas Mukomberanwa,
Woman



Nicholas Mukomberanwa, *My spirit and I*, National Gallery, March 1995

Nicholas Mukomberanwa is one of the few veteran Zimbabwean stone sculptors to have broken the ethnographic mould. This retrospective exhibition of 72 sculptures and drawings (1962-1995) however did not contain his best nor make apparent the individual stylistic and conceptual development of his work. In the 60s, Mukomberanwa addressed traditional African beliefs and socio-religious themes; his early style was detailed, rounded, with exaggerated features as in *Rain God* and *Chaminuka the Great*. This period was followed by a more expressionist outlook in the 70s, when his work announced pre-independence prophecies evident in *Breaking Free* and showed experimentation with abstract planes and stylisation. By the late 80s, post-independence disillusion preoccupied the artist, captured in *Street Beggar*, *Greed* and *Too Many*

Preachers. These later works are moralistic in tone and deal with issues of corruption, exploitation and the capitalist mentality. These pieces established the artist as social critic.

Mukomberanwa's work is narrative and immediate. Though presented with a modernist facade, the sculpture expresses African ideals and mannerisms. This is, for example, articulated in his rendering of anatomy and posture. Most of the figurative works are crouching, seated or kneeling in typical Shona fashion. His work over the years reveals a consistent search for a new way of expressing himself and a progressive reduction to minimalist statement. Technically, Mukomberanwa's control of three dimensional viewpoints and interplay of forms, coupled with an asymmetrical rhythm of curves and angles in his best work, reveals his use of both intuition and formal sculptural intelligence.

It is a pity that some private collectors refused to loan works to the National Gallery (though this speaks to the personal regard collectors have for Mukomberanwa's work and to the Gallery's unwillingness to provide insurance), and that the layout denied any understanding of the artist's development, as what could have been the most important retrospective ever mounted in the country, failed to do Mukomberanwa justice. TM

The dove's footprints

Marjorie Locke was well known to Zimbabweans for her commitment to the arts and crafts of this country. What we didn't know was that, in addition to running the old, and facilitating the development of the new, Bulawayo Art Gallery, in the face of seemingly endless and insurmountable obstacles, she was quietly carrying out an in-depth study of the traditional woven patterns found in the baskets, mats, beer strainers, penis sheaths and other household objects of the Ndebele people. In *The Dove's Footprints*, published posthumously by Baobab Books, her work has come to fruition. The name and a concise explanation of the origin and meaning of each basketry pattern is given, accompanied by illustrative close-up photographs. The simple direct text gives the materials (a list of botanical names is included), dyes, techniques and uses, as well as identifying which district each object comes from. A detailed introduction sets the cultural and historical background and space is given to a description of the coiling, twining, starting and finishing techniques employed. The book closes with a look at variations on traditional patterns, contemporary patterns and the effects of commercialisation. Line drawings indicating the form of the baskets would have been a useful addition. The layout has been beautifully done although the designer has been seduced by the softness of the dove rather than the more relevant crisp markings of its footprints. Our knowledge of the material culture of Zimbabwe is enlarged and enhanced by this immensely pleasurable book. This nation owes another debt of gratitude to Marjorie Locke. BM

The Dove's Footprints by Marjorie Locke,
Harare: Baobab Books, 1995, Z\$110.

Raku workshops, Rosselli Gallery, Masvingo, March 1995

Four raku glazing workshops run by Gerrit Meyburg of Gwaai Potteries were recently held at the Rosselli Gallery. Raku is a very direct quick method of glazing, creating random markings and textural effects. The pot is taken out of the kiln red-hot whereupon the glaze 'crazes' or cracks on exposure to the air. While still hot the pot is smoked in leaves, grass or sawdust causing various stains and markings. These

A new venue: Pierre Gallery, March 1995

Eagerly anticipated as a new artspace, the Gallery Pierre threw open its doors to the public at the end of March. Former Alliance Francaise and Le Forum curator, Olivier Sultan, has created his own

Africa 95 begins in August and runs until December throughout Britain. Keston Beaton may attend a workshop and exhibit at the Yorkshire Sculpture Park and possibly other Zimbabwean work by Berry Bickle and Keston will be at the Delfina Studio Trust in London. Exhibitions include:

a n d forthcoming exhibitions and events

effects are preserved by plunging the pot into cold water. The resulting colours are rich; blues and greens oxidising to reds. Ceramics in Zimbabwe have been suffering from a lack of inspiration. Let's hope this initiative will spur the potters on. For visitors to Masvingo, the Rosselli Gallery, recently re-opened under the enthusiastic new management of John and Nicky Rosselli, is at 39 Hughes Street. NR

Visual arts by BAT students, National Gallery, May 1995

Students, particularly in our conformist and conservative society, need to be encouraged to express themselves freely, to explore, be bold. They also need to be pushed into thinking about their subjects and engaging with the ambiguities of life. Work on this exhibition is disappointing in its scale and treatment. The predominance of small monochromatic prints may testify to the learning of techniques but in the end the artist uses whatever materials she/he can get to carry her/his personal, evocative vision. One student who is developing a strong personal style and statement is Harry Mutasa. His paintings display a pleasure in colour and movement, and his metal sculptures capture the physical tensions of bodies with humour and panache. The range of his subject matter indicates an awareness of the multiplicity of creative possibilities. Another young artist of promise is Givemore Huvasa whose small etchings were sensitively done. The improving standard of the graphics holds possibilities for the future. BM

exhibition venue at the corner of Churchill and Normandy Avenues in Alexandra Park, Harare. The gallery is a converted residence, graced with a pool and a landscaped garden, temporarily home until the end of July to the first exhibition of — for want of a title — Sultan's Favourites. The *Northern News* put it succinctly when they said of the exhibition: "All of his old favourites of wood and stone are there: Gutsa, Jack, Munyaradzi, Tshuma and others," and indeed the show represents much of the talent that Sultan has highlighted, and in some cases nurtured in former exhibitions, now all brought together under one roof. The work is displayed throughout the house and in the garden beyond.

I am particularly fond of Fanizani Akuda's mischievously smiling figures in stone. His faces seem to combine characteristics of oriental and Shona features, in humourous surrender to all of life's vicissitudes. Zephania Tshuma's work, often vaguely obscene and sometimes very amusing — jutting red penises and figures with heads stuck up their bums — are also here in profusion. Rashid Jogee's masterly painting, justly named *So That We May Know Each Other*, spans one entire wall. His wildly stroked paint, vigorously applied layer upon layer, seems to blow all ways at once and creates a dynamic tension amongst the more serene works that surround it. I've never much gone in for the darling of the stone sculpture aficionados, Henry Munyaradzi, but his ubiquitous, blank, circular-eyed signature faces, adorning all manner and shape of stone, are here amply in evidence. Lazarus Takawira's sculptures remind me of birds about to ascend in flight. These sleek and streamlined creatures are perhaps the most stylised of all the works on display paying little heed to the stone from which they are delicately carved. Aside from Jogee, amongst the painters, Celine Gilbert's darkly expressionist paean to the last call, *The Pub*, most impressed me, as did Jill Bond's delightfully sensual *Sleepless Nights*.

Sultan plans to hold regular one-person shows on a monthly basis and hopes that this new venture will generate fresh criticism and closer dialogue between artists and the public. DJ

Contemporary Metalwork in Africa (Crafts Council); The Art of African Textiles (Barbican); Africa: The Art of a Continent (Royal Academy of Arts); many other galleries will also be having African exhibitions (details from the Editor). Margaret Garlake will be *Gallery's* eye in London, and Tony Mhonda will be in Yorkshire, giving us their impressions of Africa 95 and its impact in Britain.

Therese Houyoux from Geneva will be exhibiting paintings and graphics at Gallery Delta from Tuesday 25 July. Houyoux works with the human form, exploring through process changes in imagery.

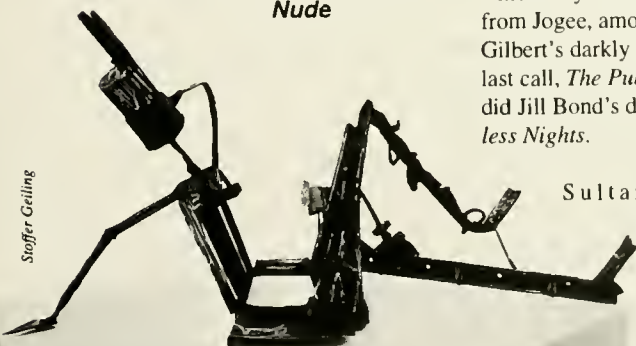
Amakhosi Theatre from Bulawayo will be holding their Inxusa festival at Gallery Delta in August. Cont Mhlanga's group is justly renowned for their energetic expressive drama. Don't miss this chance to see some of Zimbabwe's best — watch the press for details.

Helen Lieros will exhibit paintings and graphics at Gallery Delta in late June/early July. The works are part of her Inheritance series and will feature new developments using paper mouldings.

Women artists of Zimbabwe will be the focus of the Longman exhibition at the National Gallery from early August to mid-September. Also exhibited during this period, will be work by **Harare Polytechnic students**. A chance to gauge the potential of the Poly as Zimbabwe's 'School of Art'?

Martin van der Spuy will exhibit paintings at the Pierre Gallery in July. At the same venue in August, a one-man show by **Joseph Muzondo** will feature stone and metal sculpture, and in September, **Brighton Sango's** stone sculpture will be on show. Pierre Gallery is running a **competition** with Alliance Francaise on the theme of 'Sport and Movement' and prizes will be awarded.

Harry Mutasa, *Sunbathing Nude*



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Gallery

The art magazine from Gallery Delta

No 5

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Gallery Delta, the publisher and the editor gratefully acknowledge the following sponsors who have contributed to the production of this issue of *Gallery* magazine:



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Gallery

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Cover: Henry Thompson, *Bridge*, 1995, 30 x 40cm,
acrylic on canvas. Photo by Dani Deudney

Left above: Tapfuma Gutsa, *Gadget of Influence*, 1995,
approx 200 x 40cm, mixed media.

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Publisher: Derek Huggins. Editor: Barbara Murray. Design & typesetting:
Myrtle Mallis. Origination by HPP Studio. Printing by A.W. Bardwell &
Co. Paper Express from Graphtec Ltd.

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Subscriptions from Gallery Publications, c/o Gallery Delta, 110 Livingstone
Avenue, P.O. Box UA 373 Union Avenue, Harare. Tel: (14) 792135.



Artnotes

So *Gallery* has survived one year in print and the wealth of material that deserves publication is so large that, finances allowing, we will be publishing well into the millenium. In this issue of *Gallery*, we focus on one of the major strands in Zimbabwe's artistic tradition: landscape.

The visual experience of nature and people's interaction with nature have continuously absorbed painters in Zimbabwe, from the earliest San artists who expressed their consuming communion with nature on their cave walls to our more recent painters who have almost all included landscape, at one time or another, in their work.

Landscape painting offers the viewer a foothold in nature — a way of seeing a specific place, of experiencing the permanency, the variety and the flux of existence. It reminds us of the origin and absolute foundation of our existence: the enduring cycle of destructive and creative change of which humankind is only a recent and often irritating fragment.

Landscape is not currently 'popular' content in the art of First World countries where over-industrialisation and the ramifications of technological progress, urbanisation and excessive materialism make individuals' relationships with nature increasingly tenuous. In Zimbabwe, we are still very much figures in a landscape. The majority of our population lives in countryside. Towns and cities are relatively small outgrowths. All but main roads readily revert to grass and mud. Many of those who do live in cities either have close ties with extended family and inherited land in the rural areas or treasure their easy ability to get out into the 'bush'. Despite history, politics and emerging technology, nature still dominates our lives. The land surrounds. The drought threatens. The rain brings release. Nature is patently and directly the source of our survival. In Belgium recently when 100 children were asked to draw a chicken, 78 of them drew a headless, plucked, frozen, packaged version! This is not yet the scenario in Zimbabwe. In a global context, Africa is one area where natural forces are pre-eminent and this is reflected in our art.

Perhaps too, the landscape of Africa itself arouses a strong response, demanding an image. In his *Return to Paradise*, after years of exile, the committedly political Breitenbach admits:

"... the essence of Africa is in its clarity, its bareness, its horizons burned clean of

history and of time... I was filled with awe at the eternal beauty of it, diminishing our human concerns, or at least putting all in a bigger perspective."

Modern angst which springs from and focuses on our moral and philosophical uncertainty and our potential destruction of ourselves and our environment is by omission a statement of the importance of landscape. While expression of that angst is honest and essential, it has become unbalanced, a dictatorial mindset. Talking about the work of the Post-impressionists, Dr A C Barnes, founder of the Barnes Foundation collection, said that their paintings were *"richly expressive of life that means most to the normal man alive today."* He wrote later:

"If the creative impulse leaves its mark in a material that generates similar feelings in other people, the work of art is a human document of permanent worth. Its degree of worth is determined by the extent to which the artist has enriched, improved, humanized, the common experience of man in the world in which he lives."

I would venture to suggest that much of the newest art coming out of people's experience of the deteriorating natural environment in First World countries serves only to impoverish, depress and dehumanise the world in which we live. Much of this art is shocking and disturbing, a valid, necessary response to contemporary reality but it offers little in terms of positive alternatives. Landscape painters in Zimbabwe allow us to experience the power and beauty of nature and our place within that beauty.

This is not a promotion of idyllic and utopian pastoralism but rather a reminder that landscape paintings *"... possess... regenerative power... and demonstrate once more that nature could be the ultimate source of strength for the contemporary world."* Pissarro said, *"Salvation lies in nature, now more than ever."* He felt that the troubled times in which they lived (in 1900!) demanded a keen awareness of the visual world and that developing a sensitivity to nature was vital not only to good art but also to meaningful existence.

One of the greatest artists of the 20th century, Cezanne, encouraged artists, *"There is a passing moment in the world. Paint it in all its reality. Forget everything else for that."* Part of our passing moment in Zimbabwe is our still dominant and stunning landscape, largely unaltered as yet by the particular scourges of what we could

label the 'over-developed' world. Zimbabwean artists continue to attempt to capture its significance for our lives and to offer human documents which can enrich, improve and humanise.

In this issue we focus on a few of the varied representations of landscape in contemporary Zimbabwean art. There is not room to include many who deserve mention but it serves to affirm the place landscape painting has in our community despite its not being chosen for exhibition overseas. Along with the figurative, abstract and conceptual, landscape maintains its place and contributes to a "bigger perspective" in our art scene here.

In the review of Nicholas Mukomberanwa's retrospective exhibition in *Gallery* no 4, reference was made to the National Gallery's *"...unwillingness to provide insurance."* The Head of Exhibitions assures us that the National Gallery does in fact provide full insurance on any works loaned by collectors. However, works brought to the National Gallery by artists are subject to restricted insurance. We apologise for any damage the statement may have caused to the National Gallery's reputation.

Art revels in and seeks to understand and express the variety and multiformity of human experience. One thing history proves is the impossibility of pronouncing infallibly. A short time ago in Zimbabwe one man infamously pronounced *"never in my lifetime"* now we have another pronouncing *"never ever"*! It may take time but inevitably his dictate will be reversed by knowledge and justice. Art history reveals a continuum of change in people's understanding and *Gallery* actively sets out to provoke such changes. We aim to present art from Africa so that people both here and elsewhere may see the varied representations of local experience. We also seek views on art from beyond our borders and in this issue we include a 'Letter from London' by the well-known art critic, Margaret Garlake. Perhaps the work she offers and her insights may spark some changes locally.

The Editor.



Henry Thompson, *Mountain*, 1995, 61 x 76cm, acrylic

To celebrate a landscape

Filling his canvases with light, colour and space, Henry Thompson, has worked slowly to build up a distinctive body of work. In this interview with Barbara Murray he talks about painting landscape and his latest canvases.

BM: Henry, I've known you and your work for many years now and what surprises me is not so much that you have recently started making Nyanga landscapes but rather that you haven't done so before!

HT: Well, I know that for both of us Nyanga has always stood high on the list of favourite places. It is both visually and emotionally very accommodating, isn't it? But I cannot remember ever wanting to paint it. Besides, in the early days my interests were elsewhere. I was drifting into an abstracted mode of expression and the Nyanga landscape just did not fit the bill. I was doing mostly landscapes, getting progressively more abstracted. I wanted to see how far I could push the landscape into abstraction without losing the image.

BM: Why do you consistently choose landscape as your subject?

HT: Because for me it is such a sane thing to do. I grew up on the edge of the Kalahari which is a part of the world fairly often subjected to prolonged droughts and one has no choice but to deal with essentials if one is going to survive. You learn to read the landscape.

BM: Modernism and post-modernism largely ignore landscape. What place do you consider landscape painting to hold in contemporary art?

HT: Perhaps not a prominent place but this is not unusual. I don't think it is all that often that the landscape achieves the prominence it had with Constable and Turner, and then afterwards, with the Impressionists and the Fauves.

BM: Many of your works incorporate the human figure in the landscape. What is your thinking behind this?

HT: The figures I tried to integrate into the surface of the landscapes in such a way that the one cannot be separated from the other. The thinking is that if you are going to destroy the landscape you will also destroy the figure.

BM: Who have been the influential artists for your landscape work? For example, in your early painting days you must have been aware of the Nyanga landscapes that Robert Paul was doing at the time. How did you react to them?

HT: By the time I got to see Robert Paul's work, I was already a confirmed Nyanga addict. I was impressed by his work and I still am. He is for me the foremost painter of the Nyanga landscape. During the 60s, the Rhodes Hotel was run by a woman whose name escapes me for the moment. She owned a good collection of Robert Paul's Nyanga landscapes which she hung in the sittingroom just off the main entrance. This room became my first port of call whenever I went to Nyanga. When she eventually left she took the paintings with her and it has never been the same since.

BM: What is it about Paul's work precisely that you like?

HT: I don't believe one can ever say anything 'precisely' about painting! No, his biggest attraction for me is something completely different: he was a no-nonsense person and he painted that way!

BM: Apart from Robert Paul's work, I know that you read widely and have studied the works of other landscape artists such as Cezanne...

HT: Ah! Cezanne. I thought you would get around to him; one always does. Didn't you tell me you went to Aix some years ago?

BM: Yes, I did and I wish I'd understood him better then. Even so, what struck me was how Cezannesque the landscape still was and perhaps always will be.

HT: Yes, well this gives one some idea of the measure of this hermitical old genius. His prolonged and probing dialogue with Mont Sainte-Victoire must surely be one of the greatest triumphs in the annals of landscape painting. One feels that his exploration of this landscape was largely an exploration of the self. D H Lawrence wrote somewhere that Western painting has never been able to achieve anything worth a damn apart from the few apples that Cezanne painted. Well, as we all know, he became a power-house for twentieth century art. The trouble though is when you plug into a genius of this stature you plug in at the level of your own understanding and the results are not always commendable!

BM: What about Matisse, Picasso, De Kooning, Soutine, Beckmann etc... painters you often refer to?

HT: When we are talking landscape there is not much to be said here. Matisse is regarded by many as possibly one of the best landscape painters of this century. While he was still a student, Gustave Moreau told him that he was destined to simplify painting. Well he did and he did it beautifully. If one considers that he is also one of the greatest colorists ever, I can't see how he could possibly go wrong with landscape! But he felt no great attraction for it and neither did Picasso. Soutine on the other hand did, and all those strange landscapes that seem precariously to teeter on the edge of total chaos which he painted while he was living in Céret were to have a lasting effect on many subsequent painters including De Kooning. But it is De Kooning's more structured paintings that appeal to me, paintings such as *Door to the River*, *Montauk Highway* and *Ruth Zowie* for instance.



Dani Deidner

BM: Getting back to your current preoccupation, does the *Nyanga* series on which you are now working differ in any way from other series that you have done in the past?

HT: Well, there haven't been all that many. Not only am I not prolific, I'm as slow as all get out... but to get back to your question. No, not really. Apart from the *Café Afrique* series, they are all of them about landscape. And even the cafés should be seen as the places of concord in the transit from one landscape to another. The *Café Afrique* series started sometime in the 80s. I have been an incurable café-ist for most of my life and the café theme, for me, suggests a wide range of possibilities: I'm working on it!

BM: So that's what you are doing in the cafés... research! What is it about cafés that intrigues you?

HT: It has more to do with being recharged than being intrigued. It's a place away from the place where you work, where, if your luck holds, the coffee is good and so is the company. It's a place where people come and go... But getting back to the series, my first was called *Refuge* and was the direct result of the armed struggle in the 70s. I did these paintings in an effort to come to terms with my own anxieties. They were inward-looking landscapes with all self-revealing markings kept to a minimum and are perhaps the most abstract paintings I have done. They spilt over into the early 80s as interrupted images and barricaded landscapes. About this time, give or take, I did a big painting of two bathers in the open to mark the end of hostilities. Meanwhile a new series, which I called *Mozambican Summer* was on its way. These paintings, on which I worked off and on until the early 90s, were landscapes anticipating more pleasurable times in this sub-region.

BM: How and why did this *Nyanga* series begin?

HT: A few days after the opening of a solo exhibition of mine at Gallery Delta in '92, Sarah and I went to Nyanga. Some months later I did my first Nyanga landscape. Before the year was out I did another one. The following year I worked on other paintings and then, in '94, I returned to what was now obviously becoming a *Nyanga* series. What I had in mind right from the start was to do some, not too many, moderately sized paintings to celebrate a landscape that has given me so much pleasure for so many years.

BM: Your reluctance to paint the Nyanga landscape has been a longstanding one. Now we have this present involvement. Could this series have been induced by the *Mozambican Summers*, both being about the pleasure of landscape?

HT: I would not rule that out, but you know it is amazing how much visual information filters through even when you may be looking with only half an eye. And you need this information when you respond emotionally to whatever comes to demand an image. I think this is how the creative process works for me.

BM: Did you have a clear picture in your mind of the images that you wanted to make?

HT: Not clear, no. But I knew I wanted to create a spirit of place that would be a celebration of the landscape. The thing to do was to avoid the extremes of visual mimicry or the hieroglyphics of introspection.

BM: What do you mean when you talk of 'visual mimicry'?

HT: What I mean is a too detailed graphic description that will

completely swamp the feel of the place. As I said before, what I was after was to create a spirit of place with only enough visual information as touchstones to achieve this.

BM: What appeals to you most about the Nyanga landscape?

HT: It has a quality of light that appeals to me greatly. I am talking about the emotional light rather than the physical one. And secondly, the space. For a mountainous terrain it is remarkably open and uncluttered.

BM: Light and space would suggest colours...

HT: Exactly. I was going to have to rely on colour to do so many



things for me. For instance, how do you paint mountains fairly close-up so they don't block that openness you wish to achieve? The only solution I managed to come up with was to run the colour, let's say blue, of the sky, as far down as possible and then drawing the outline of the mountain, a simple line, somewhere in this blue colour field. In other words, the mountain and the sky are exactly the same blue. Now when you look at this painting the blue below the outline of the mountain seems to be slightly darker than the identical blue of the sky. Colour can be very obliging, sometimes!

BM: Now that many of the paintings are completed do you feel reasonably satisfied or do you...

HT: Please don't say it! You know, in the Pompidou Centre there is this marvellous painting by Matisse called *Violinist at the Window*. He stands with his back to the viewer playing his violin and I think Matisse was right. I can't help feeling that instead of doing these Nyanga paintings, a lively tune played on a pennywhistle for instance would have been much more to the point, don't you think so?

(above) Henry Thompson, *Hill*, 1995, 111 x 120cm, acrylic

(left) Henry Thompson, *The Wader*, 1995, 51 x 41cm, acrylic



Steffen Gellert

(above) Peter Lanyon, *Portreath Watch*, 1962, 183 x 122cm, oil on canvas. Within weeks of his return from southern Africa, Peter Lanyon was painting the small Cornish harbour of Portreath. He continued to do so throughout his life. *Portreath Watch*, 1962, is his last painting of the subject.

(right above) Peter Lanyon, (title unknown), 1938, 33 x 40cm, oil on board

(right above) Peter Lanyon, (title unknown), 1938, 33 x 40cm, oil on board

Peter & Margaret Garlake discover evidence in Zimbabwe of the effect of the African landscape on Peter Lanyon, an artist of international stature



Stoffer Geilng

The open places : a Cornishman in Africa

In September 1993, during a visit to the office of a keen art collector in Harare, two small landscape paintings of southern African views attracted attention by the vigour and freshness of their treatment. The collector told us he had bought them at the auction of the contents of an old colonial house in Harare. He had read the signature on them as 'Ganyon' but his research had failed to reveal any southern African artist of that name.

It appeared to us that they were almost certainly very early works of the Cornish artist, Peter Lanyon, for whom we had both had, for many years, a particular enthusiasm. The paintings were removed from their frames to see whether there was any confirmatory evidence on the backs. There was not, but one bore a painting of the Conical Tower of Great Zimbabwe, confirming at least that the artist had visited this country. Slides of the paintings and descriptions of the signature were sent to

Lanyon's widow, Sheila, who immediately confirmed that they were indeed by him.

Peter Lanyon was born in 1918 in the Cornish fishing town of St Ives. His father was at the centre of the town's lively artistic community; he was also somewhat of a political radical and, for instance, a strong supporter of the Afrikaans cause in the Boer War. Peter studied art during his schooling at Clifton College and later at Penzance Art School. Encouraged by the art historian, Adrian Stokes, he then joined the Euston Road Art School in London to work under William Coldstream and Victor Pasmore. Though he considered this an "exceedingly good training", he left after only two months. At this time, Lanyon's paintings were set down in a lively, sketchy manner which inevitably showed the impact of his teachers and of the great modern pioneers and sometimes hinted at the sensuous paint and bold marks of his mature work.

A few days after his twentieth birthday, Lanyon, his mother Lilian and his sister Mary went out to South Africa. Prior to her marriage to Peter's father, Lilian had been married to a mining engineer on the Rand. He had died of tuberculosis very young. The family arrived in Cape Town



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young. The family arrived in Cape Town on 25 March 1938 and travelled to Johannesburg where Lilian's first husband's family entertained them and introduced them to the social life of the white middle class. Peter, radical and politically aware, was shocked by white racial attitudes and was attracted by the bush more than the cities. They made several excursions from Johannesburg, the most memorable being to the Mont aux Sources in the Drakensberg where Mary vividly recalls that Peter was so impressed by the drama and vastness that he sketched while he rode.

On 21 May the three left for the Victoria Falls where Peter, who painted assiduously throughout the trip, was furious because the light was too harsh to work. Peter then spent two or three days in Northern Rhodesia.

"I said I wanted to paint an African, so they got a native to stand up in front of me and play a concertina, one of those round ones, and I hated it. I couldn't paint him and yet I couldn't understand what I hated — there was something terrible that this man should be standing up and doing this. I remember what I did. I threw the painting away and I sat down and asked him to sit down — he was very embarrassed about this — and asked him to play, and he played some marvellous music, and I still get echoes of what he played from this music that is played by the Cape coloureds and the Africans in the Cape, which I think is even greater than jazz."

The party then returned through Bulawayo where they visited the Matopos and Peter greatly admired some of the rock paintings. Between 29 May and 12 June, the Lanyons stayed with the Crease family in Salisbury from where they visited Mazowe, the Chinoyi Caves and Great Zimbabwe. On the voyage out to South Africa, Peter had become attached to Peggy Crease, who was later to marry a van Niekerk whose brother was a tobacco farmer. The two paintings first identified may have been given, by Peter, to the Crease family.

This was almost the end of their trip; they spent 14 to 16 June in Johannesburg. One ill-documented episode remains. In Johannesburg, Peter held his first one-man exhibition. This could either have been in May and included paintings made in the first two months only, or during the two days at the end of their visit to include paintings made in their three weeks in Rhodesia. But two days is scarcely time to select, frame, catalogue and hang an exhibition; Peter was at this time painting prolifically, probably producing at least one

painting every day, so he would have had ample material to select from before they left South Africa for the north. The most logical guess is that most works were selected and the show prepared before they returned. Mary recalls only that the gallery was a small, upstairs space and that no other artist shared the show. No catalogue survives but given that, at this time, Peter was working on a small scale, he probably showed at least 20 paintings. Two of them may be those identified in Harare. Two were recently sold by Sheila Lanyon. She retains one, of Cape carts probably in Cape Town. On the reverse, Peter painted a portrait of himself in the uniform of the Royal Air Force which he joined in 1940. Another, a larger work, of houses in Cape Town with Table Mountain in the background, was given to the Newlyn Art Gallery for auction in 1969 and re-auctioned in Penzance in 1994. Some are almost certainly still in South Africa or Zimbabwe, unidentified by their present owners.

Lanyon later spoke eloquently of the importance to him of the African experience:

"South Africa had an immense influence on me. I found I suddenly met a country which was uncultured, a country that was wide open and had no sensibility, if you can understand what that means about a country. It was so at the Cape, which had an oldness about it, and was so in the bush amongst the animals... The country was too big for me, in fact it was so big I insisted at one time that I must go up one of the mountains, so I went with my sister on horseback and I remember climbing up a rock face of about 300 feet at about 9500 feet up and sweating with the lack of oxygen. We spent the night up there on top. I found that I really began to get to grips with it. And I've still got drawings that I did on the back of a horse on the way up, and I think they actually had an influence on my interest in very high places, vastnesses, for instance in what I would call a frontier civilisation, something which is not established and small and tiny and meticulously kept like Britain or Switzerland, but the open places... When I came back here I got extremely disillusioned with painting what was in front of me. I found that going down the coast and painting a bit of Hamibah's Carn or Zennor Carn was very boring because I had tricks and ways of doing it."

Often inaccurately described as an Abstract Expressionist painter, Lanyon was certainly intensely aware and interested in all developments in this field, visited the United States with increasing frequency and

became a close friend of Mark Rothko and Robert Motherwell. However, Lanyon insisted on the *"primary importance of knowing before making"* and while his paintings often resemble those of gestural artists working *"on automatic"*, his own process was far removed from their Zen-inspired emptying of the unconscious. Yet his art was also intuitive: intuition was set to work on a vast store of information recording his relationship with the countryside. Throughout his life, Lanyon insisted:

"I'm really just an old landscape painter like Constable, only they can't see it. I shall probably end up painting a lot of sheep on a hillside."

Having chosen to work in paint, Lanyon struggled constantly to extort from it an expression corresponding to his multi-dimensional sensuous experience of landscape. Far from being a quiet contemplation of nature, this experience involved immersion in sea, gales and mine-shafts; observation of the variations in the greens, greys and blues of the countryside; mobility to register the abrupt shifts in angle, scale and distance to be seen in the landscape of West Penwith in Cornwall and, finally, the mastery of another dimension by learning to fly a glider. This last ended with his death from injuries sustained in a gliding accident in August 1964.

Southern Africa was the starting point of an important artistic journey. The Drakensberg first stimulated his fascination with high places and vertiginous viewpoints. The paintings he made in southern Africa are raw and tentative but it seems that the intense impact of the landscape was an important contribution to the developing sense of space — formulated from sound, smell, touch, local myth and history as well as visual appearance — that informed all his mature work.

We are most grateful to Mary Schofield, Peter's sister, for providing an itinerary of their journey and telling us of her memories of it; to Sheila Lanyon for confirming the identification of the two Harare paintings and showing us three others. She also probably has Peter's diary of the trip but has not yet located it again. The quotations are taken from taped interviews transcribed in Andrew Lanyon's book, *Peter Lanyon*, privately published by him in 1990. Some material is taken from Margaret Garlake's "The Constructions of Peter Lanyon" in *Peter Lanyon: Air, Land and Sea*, London: The South Bank Centre, 1992. We would, of course, be delighted to hear of any other paintings or information on Lanyon's African experience.

There are many truths
about the landscape of Africa.
Barbara Murray writes about
the honest response to one
such truth in the work of one of
Zimbabwe's most resilient painters

Jean Hahn : impressionist of Africa

"...art is not, and never has been, but an affair of a piercing eye and an able hand."

Frank McEwen wrote this in his introduction to the 1968 Eleventh Annual Show at the National Gallery. While one may argue that he ignored the passionate heart, inquiring mind and intense spirit, there is something in what he said which much of the modern art world has forgotten. McEwen went on: *"How more endearing they (the works selected for the annual) are than laboriously academic exercises or the amateurs' 'pretties' which might in 'mind' and matter have materialised in Welwyn Garden City some time between the wars. They are more meaningful also than echoes of the last decade of Paris or New York 'trivialism'. It is the art here, on this ground, born from the bowels of ancient Africa, that will tell in time, and, like Papenfus, Paul, Wood or Hahn ... reflect directly an inner power."*

The 'pretties' he was referring to were the msasa, jacaranda and Matopos landscapes that proliferated in Rhodesia at the time, equivalents of which have done such a disservice to landscape painting throughout the world. In Jean Hahn's work, McEwen recognised the realisation of one of the many possible true reflections of Africa. There is indeed nothing academic, laborious, amateur, picturesque, pretty or trivial in the work of Jean Hahn. With her restrained palette of bleached-out yellows, warm earth red-browns, greys and her economic line, Hahn captures a vital spirit of place and a direct expression of nature which anyone who has visited the bush of Zimbabwe cannot fail to recognise.

Jean Hahn first exhibited in Zimbabwe in 1957 and for 38 years she has remained true to her own spontaneous responses to the landscape of Africa. Critics over the years have spoken of her fast and capable technique using mainly oil or wash drawing; one wrote that her paintings were like *"a breath of fresh air at a gunner's smoker!"* He went on: *"Her style is brisk and clean, her drawing incisive and her eye... keen."* When she exhibited in Pretoria in 1968, the critic wrote: *"so assured in her use of line, so able to discard the inessentials in catching the mood of places... a fascinating combination of discipline and freedom... the authority of the artist who knows exactly what she is after and how to achieve the effect."*

James Roberts, critic for *The Herald* wrote in 1987: *"Not many artists can capture a landscape's mood like Jean Hahn. She makes something distinctive out of what many of us thought of as commonplace. And by a restricted use of colour she intensifies atmosphere. There is a beauty here that may know nothing of tenderness but which we seek after for all that."*

Writing for *The Financial Gazette* in 1989, Pip Curling declared: *"Jean Hahn's four wash drawings make no compromises to acceptability. They are monumental in their realisation, vital in their execution and uncompromising in the stark tonality of their colour. These are the most honest works on the show."* Curling went on to say, of other painters, that they *"merely play with the landscape according to the rules of a game of (their) own invention"*, use *"the landscape as a starting point for (their) own*



(left) Jean Hahn, *Red Field*, 1985, 56 x 72cm, oil on board

(below) Jean Hahn, *Bush*, 1995, 60 x 77cm, oil on board

own self indulgence" or "miniaturise the landscape into colour-coded decorations. Pity the face of Africa that it is so used and abused."

Jean Hahn studied at the Royal Drawing School and the Chelsea School of Art in London as well as in Paris, Geneva and Frankfurt. She has exhibited at the Royal Academy and the Imperial Institute, London, as well as in Belgrade, Johannesburg, Pretoria, Port Elizabeth, Grahamstown, Bulawayo and Harare. In 1977 she had an exhibition with Brian Bradshaw and Robert Paul and she says, with a self-deprecating laugh, "I sold better than them".

If you ask Jean when she started painting she says with another laugh "a long time

ago... I wouldn't like to say!" At Chelsea School of Art her life class was taught by Henry Moore, but perhaps her most influential teacher was a woman in Switzerland who insisted on working "on the spot".

Jean says: "I never paint in a studio. I haven't got a studio, never had a studio. I go out into the bush, always. I often sit on the ground in utter discomfort to get what I want... if I'm comfortable I don't concentrate. The most difficult thing is to find the place... where you want to sit. If you saw me in the bush you'd think I was absolutely cracked. I go round in circles, talking to myself. The light is always wrong and you can't paint with the sun behind you or with the shadows. I've given up easels because they always collapse. If there's a rock or bush or something I use that. One time there was such a wind I had to tie myself to

a fence.... quite mad... and I come back completely exhausted. Some I do on my knees. I always finish my paintings on the spot. I never rework them."

Hahn has always painted the landscape. Travelling and living in Europe it was the untouched, uninhabited areas that appealed to her and since coming to Africa her work has singlemindedly concerned the raw bush. "I like wide open spaces but I like to look into things... and always in the dry season. I paint the dry grass in Africa which has been sucking up the sun all the year, till the rains come. When I first came from Europe we lived out in the bush and I thought everything was terribly dry and dusty... and then I suddenly realised that that was Africa, and now I can't wait for it. I remember going back to Europe, the grass was deep green and I thought it was frightful! This is a very hard country."

Her choice in reading is biography rather than novels, in painting impressionism rather than expressionism... the real rather than the fanciful. Jean goes on: "I'm anti anything contrived... I'm more impressionist I suppose. I'm against thinking too much... a spontaneous reaction to what's there. I work very fast... if I'm slow then it's a disaster. Working slowly means much less concentration and too much time to think. Thinking is dangerous I think. Many modern painters are thinking too much. When you think too much you get so complicated... it's a different way of looking. Dissecting is what I don't like... taking apart... it becomes almost mechanical... maybe mechanical is not the right word, but not spontaneous, no feeling... I think it's not necessary to understand it. Once you start pulling something apart it loses its magic. Magic is a bad word... spirit, essence perhaps. But if you start analysing





**Jean Hahn, *Darkening Hills*, 1994,
49 x 61cm, oil on board**

it loses its magic. That's my quarrel with art now... everything has to be explained. And I think that's a pity... I hate everything being dissected. It kills the aura, the atmosphere. It's a way of seeing. Much of this talk about art is contrived."

Other artists whose work she likes include Luis Meque, another painter whose work is immediate and spontaneous. Talking about paintings by him it turned out that those she didn't admire were the ones I knew he had reworked. *"If I don't work quickly it's had it as far as I'm concerned... if it's worked too hard... anything done slowly is a disaster. Working fast one obviously concentrates more... or at least I do! If I don't do it fast I start thinking... thinking that it's a disaster! Adda Geiling's work is spontaneous, fast... and I like John Piper, very spontaneous... Cezanne, yes always. Picasso, no. Matisse, no. Turner's late work is wonderful."*

Jean herself lives in a very ad hoc way... last week she kayaked down the rapids at Victoria Falls! Her small cottage in Harare contains only the bare essentials; only what one needs to live with a minimum of comfort. Paintings and drawings are hung or propped everywhere, amongst books, papers and family photos, on the floor, on top of cupboards. The small garden shed is totally taken up by work done over the

years. Most weeks she goes out to friends in some part of the country where she is dropped alone somewhere in the bush to paint. Her many trips to the bush reveal the extremes she will happily go to to find her subject. *"When in the bush, I concentrate madly... could be surrounded by herds of wild animals without noticing them! Last year one friend I was staying with said 'Where shall I leave you' and I said, 'Well somewhere here' and we went down to the Mutyati River. There was lots of splashing going on and I said, 'What's that?' and he said, 'Crocs I suppose.' Then he dropped me and I began painting. After a time I stepped back to see what I'd been doing and there was a loud swish and rustling in the bush just behind me and I looked down and there was a large snake. It was an adder of some sort and he was definitely warning me. I carried on but after that I was not so keen to go there. And there was another ridiculous story... years ago I went out with some hunters and they said, 'Where do you want to go?' and I said, 'Drop me here' because they were going after crocs and they said they'd come back in a couple of hours. And I'd seen in the morning a croc on the island in the middle of the river. So anyway they dropped me and that was that. And after a time I suddenly noticed, on the sand, just behind me, large tracks! If a croc comes you know there's nothing you can do. Anyway I called the picture Crocs Around."*

Jean can't be bothered with making an impression on anyone... *"I don't want to express myself in painting. Nobody wants to know about me, at least I don't think so. I don't usually talk about my painting. I have always painted from an early age and never really philosophised about it. I dislike any reference to 'contrive' or 'style'. One should paint and not have 'motives' or 'trends' — it's all 'tendencies' in the world today... obviously difficult to avoid!"*

Jean Hahn's paintings reflect her character. They are sparse, direct and real. Her sensitive use of a restricted colour palette relies on truth rather than drama. There are no splashes of primaries to enhance or intensify. Her art is a true and natural interpretation accomplished with bold fluid lines; the subject rendered in quick, free brushwork, economic, vigorous and straight-forward. Her spaces are uncluttered, picking out the essentials, capturing the mood of the sparse, dry bush and creating in the viewer the illusion of being within that landscape. It is work that speaks of 'a piercing eye and an able hand', of honesty and integrity, of the dedicated life of a painter and of a love of the African bush.

Seeking to broaden our conceptions,
Tim McLoughlin, lecturer in English at UZ,
writes

Ways of seeing the rural landscape

The aim of this paper is to examine what relationship there may be between the ways rural landscapes are perceived in fiction and in painting by black Zimbabwean artists. A few generalisations may help to set our bearings: black writers in Zimbabwe, particularly in the 1970s, give brief rather than extended attention to the landscape, as though it was too obvious to dwell upon, and yet when they do they tend to stress the aridity of the land. White writers turn more deliberately to the landscape as either threatening or exotic. For black painters man is seldom absent from the landscape, usually working and always the point of attention; the painting often has a flat, two-dimensional emphasis. Landscapes by white painters seldom have people, instead an empty expansive view of untouched nature; trained in Western traditions they give careful attention to perspective, composition, light and distance. It is not possible to do more with these several divergencies in this brief paper than to focus on one area and allude to as many of the others as seem apposite.

Before discussing particulars of the fiction and painting it is important to remind ourselves why the rural landscape is a recurring feature in much Zimbabwean art. The phenomenon is hardly surprising given that the vast majority of Zimbabweans live in the rural areas and depend on the soil for their livelihood. A more salient reason is that the people have a special relation with the land. They regard it not as just another possession, an economic commodity to be bought and sold, but as a spiritual asset "associated with the history of a chiefdom, with the ruling chief and with ancestral spirits who lived on it".¹ In Shona culture the high god Mwari has ultimate dominion over the land and its fertility and the ancestral spirits together with the living community exercise ownership through rituals of respect and appeasement. The land is as much a source of spiritual as of material life, a provider of food, of protection in old age, and the tangible expression of the bonds between an individual, his tribe and his ancestors. In arts other than fiction, for example sculpture and painting, allusions to land are repeatedly found in depictions of its occupants — from the hunters of rock paintings to the 'spirit woman' of John Hlatywayo's painting, from the stone-carved birds of Great Zimbabwe to the anthropomorphic and zoomorphic figures of more recent sculpture which evoke the metaphysical dimension of the land.²

In his recent novel *Bones* Chenjerai Hove alludes to many of the above features of the landscape — its spiritual ethos, its links with the ancestors, its fecundity, its hospitable familiarity. Yet these features are given as threatened by the coming of the Settlers at the close of the 19th century. That threat is metaphored as a disease; the Spirits speak as follows:

"Disease has eaten into the wealth of your soil. Disease has eaten into the wills of your ancestors, your own fathers and mothers. Disease has sucked the juice of the land you inherited for your children. Do not sit and drink to the comfort of your hearts because there is no reason for you not to rise, not to see the clouds of vultures in the sky. Disease crawls on the rocks which you have known to sit there all the time for your protection. It has eaten into the core of the heart of the hard mupani

*and the great baobab. Disease grazes the pastures like the cattle of your wealth. Disease flies in the sky like the fish-eagle that heralds the coming of the season of the rains."*³

Several facets of a landscape are here, but the notion of disease stands against and undermines the metaphors of vitality which describe the landscape. The land is no longer a virile dwelling place. In writers earlier than Hove, this same resort to metaphor is repeatedly used to read the landscape as an indicator of spiritual and political malaise. Marechera suggests the spiritual aridity brought about by colonialism and the concomitant struggle to stay alive in this description, which together with its metaphoric thrust also has a strong visual impact which might well be conveyed in painting. He is describing his home near Rusape:

*"There was not a green blade of grass left. There was not a green leaf of hope left; the drought had raised its great red hand and gathered them all and with one hot breath had swept all the leaves into a red dot on the pencil-line of the horizon..."*⁴

But not every landscape in novels by black writers is so desolate. The perspectives so far discussed often belong to young adults, or at least to people who question the world and attempt to make sense of it. In some fiction the innocent eye of the child sees Zimbabwean landscape as hospitable, even comforting, as in this description by the young girl Tambudzai in *Nervous Conditions*:

*"The road wound down by the fields where there were always people with whom to pass ten minutes of the day... admiring the broad-leafed abundance of the maize crop when it was good... And although the stretch of road between the fields and the terminus was exposed to the sun and was, from September to April, except when it rained, harsh and scorching so that the glare from the sand scratched at your eyes, there was always shade by the fields where clumps of trees were deliberately left standing to shelter us when we ate our meals or rested between cultivating strips of the land."*⁵

What Tambudzai sees is a fertile scene in which the predominant feature is the people.

A constructive start to comparing landscape in fiction and painting can be made by reminding ourselves of some strengths and limitations endemic to the two art forms. For example the plastic arts have a much more stimulating visual impact than the written word. Painting provokes emotional and imaginative responses by the direct visual appeal of colour, form and line. Against this it can be argued that the words of fiction, while not having that immediacy of impact, allow for a more comprehensive release of the imagination. Another difference is that the serial manner in which language takes the reader from sentence to sentence and page to page achieving a cumulative rather than a single frame experience means that images can be successively employed and certain verbal associations developed for symbolic and thematic purposes. A painter can achieve visual effects of rhythm by repetitions of colour or shapes

in Zimbabwean fiction and painting

and of brush strokes but cannot use the serial effects of fiction. The emotional impact of his work, and painting is to do primarily with the expression of feeling, relies on the way he uses the space of the canvas, colour, shapes, structures, relationships.⁶ Consequently painting is less authoritative over its audience's response than fiction. It shows rather than tells its viewer what is happening and therefore has more free play with its audience's responses than fiction; it is more elusive about meanings.

In asking how black Zimbabwean painters see the rural landscape we need to remember that the medium itself presumes an attention to textures, grain, colour, lines and shapes. Zimbabwean painters seem particularly attracted to the resources of the medium to convey vitality in the landscape. To expand on this I want to look mainly at work by two painters — Kingsley Sambo and John Hlatywayo.

Kingsley Sambo (1932-77?) is that tragic figure of Zimbabwean art who started as a cartoonist, achieved flashes of brilliance with his paint brush, who continued to paint after UDI when many others gave up for want of materials, who has two paintings hanging in the Museum of Modern Art in New York, and who disappeared from his home in 1977 at the height of the liberation war, to be found dead some time later. He has a pertinence to this study not simply because he was raised and eventually retired to that same part of Zimbabwe as Marechera evokes in his fiction; he produced most of his landscapes in the 1970s when two interesting developments were taking place — a new generation of black writers was beginning to publish and talented painters like Thomas Mukarobgwa and Joseph Ndararika were turning to sculpture. When Smith declared UDI in 1965 one of the consequences was such a shortage of painting materials that many black artists, some of them with the outstanding ability of Charles Fernando, gave up altogether. Sambo persevered on his farm in the eastern region at Dewa.

Sambo usually paints in oils on moderate sized canvases. The paint is applied thickly with fluid rounded strokes giving an impression of energetic movement. His *Walking in the Forest* has a figure in the lower left foreground walking through the landscape. There is no attempt at naturalist detail. Most of the canvas is filled with the fluid rhythmical shapes of the trees in sombre looming colours — greys, blues, browns. The light is subdued with the figure distinguishable mainly by the more vertical brush strokes, not by a contrast of colour. This gives the impression of the figure being a product of and assimilated into the landscape. The lighter colours of the top of the tree-line blend in with the sky with its gentle pinks and greys combined with lively yellows and reds. The effect of the blending of the figure with the vegetation and that with the sky is to suggest a vast vibrant landscape into which man fits unobtrusively.

People fill Sambo's better known paintings of urban life, such as his oil on paper *Dance* (1962). The same is true of much urban township painting. But what happens in Sambo's rural landscapes such as *Walking in the Forest* or later in *Countryside* (1973) is that people are as it were absorbed into the landscape, reduced in size, but nevertheless there at the heart of the strong colours and thick

rhythmical brush strokes. People are living there, a small human presence in a world which extends away from them beyond the frame of the canvas. As in *Walking in the Forest* the structure of the work suggests extension beyond the canvas rather than closure.

Sambo's landscapes convey nothing of what Marechera calls "a desert place, an earth of piercing heat". The rounded brush-work, the rhythm of the strokes and the range of strong colours, reminiscent of Van Gogh whom he admired, evoke a latent even kinetic energy in the landscape.⁷ The effect is similar to that in work by his older contemporary Mukarobgwa. His painting *Where I Used to Go with My Cattle* (1961) presents the landscape as a richly coloured molten flowing interweave of terrains. The curt bold brush strokes evince his desire to follow "the rolling motion of the hills".⁸ Sambo's landscapes are full of a similar rhythmical motion. As the English painter John Craxton says of his own landscapes, "the whole dances with a static movement".⁹ One critic has said of Sambo, "he was driven by an extraordinary dynamism and the need to put his soul into his paintings".¹⁰ I take this to mean that the paintings are a way of talking about his attachment — emotional and perhaps spiritual — to the fluid energy and strength of the land, and by extension, of Zimbabwe.

This point becomes clearer if we compare landscapes by white painters like Alice Balfour (d. 1936) and others who are fascinated by the vast unpeopled spaces which they see. Much attention, particularly in water-colour painting, goes into the brush-work details of long winter grass or aloes, contorted shapes of branches, and attention to light in expansive skies. Stillness is a common effect. So too in the oil paintings of say Robert Paul who in *Inyanga Landscape* (1952) is concerned with the structure, solid shapes and colour planes of the landscape, not its naturalistic details; the undoubted achievement of Paul's paintings emanates from the physical rather than the spiritual.

There is an underlying stance towards the land seen in white painting, even in the huge detailed oil paintings of the early explorer Thomas Baines (1820-75); so often the landscape is empty of people; the painter confronted by an unfamiliar face of nature is awe-struck. The challenge for the artist is to fashion it, capture it within the frame of his canvas, to fix his artistic authority upon its wonders. Painting becomes an extension of the will and power to control.

John Hlatywayo (b. 1928) differs in many ways from Sambo; notably he is much more explicit than either Sambo or fiction writers about a spiritual presence in the landscape, and this shows not least in his use of colours and his brush-work. His work *Approaching the Light*, a mixed media study of several figures facing a treed landscape, evokes questions about who these figures are. The figures have their long draped backs turned to the viewer while they look towards dark trees which stand in a field of yellow light. Use of yellow and white in contrast to the dark browns suggest this is a painting about hope, or at least better times. The very absence of precision provokes the viewer to questions about



John Hlatywayo, *Waiting for News*, c.1970, 91 x 123cm, oil on board



Kingsley Sambo, *Country Side*, c.1965, 66 x 93cm, PVA on board (PC-9400-0192)

Kingsley Sambo, *Light*, c.1965, 84 x 66cm, oil on canvas (PC-6300-0085)

symbolism. Whatever the painting means it works with darkness on the verge of or meeting light. The people are facing the promise of a freshly invigorated landscape.

Paintings by Hlatywayo come closer than do Sambo's to a metaphoric perception of the land already noticed in the fiction. His reverence for the landscape as a place of spiritual life is evident in the broad straight movement of his brush as in his use of light. Sambo by contrast works metonymically. Every facet of his impressionistic canvas connects in an ever expanding linkage of colour and shape. In their different ways both offer us a much more positive view of the landscape to that seen in the fiction. Neither sees the land as arid physically or spiritually. What they remind us is that the land is a potent presence that absorbs and contextualises man. In this sense these paintings offer an endearing view that complements the view of fiction. The reverse side of fictional landscapes, their positive potential finds expression in the paintings. The vitality often absent in the fictional landscape is present in the paintings.

The paintings of Sambo and Hlatywayo suggest a contrary but complementary perception of the landscape to that of writers and it might be argued from this that painters were less concerned to read the landscape politically than the writers, or at least that their political reading is more rooted in traditional views of the land than the surface appearance suggests to the writers. The point to make is that the materials of painting, the challenge of colour and line, have prompted these painters to evoke the strength, movement, potential of what they see rather than the absence of these things. The materials of the art, particularly colour, prompt the choice of what to paint rather than a theme or an issue.

The paintings I have referred to are only a small part of what has become an enormously diverse artistic heritage, but they do suggest significant differences from the way landscapes are presented in fiction. The paintings convey the rhythmic vitality of the landscape, a feeling of empathy with the lurking power of the land and a presumption of close knit bonds between man and his physical and spiritual worlds. They suggest a more positive and assured ethos than many landscapes in fiction. The point for readers of fiction is not that the Spirits in Hove's *Bones* quoted earlier do not know about these positive aspects of their apparently bleak landscapes. Their plight is all the more harrowing because the landscapes which Sambo and Hlatywayo give us are the landscapes the Spirits yearn for.

Notes

- 1 Michael Bourdillon, *The Shona Peoples*, Mambo Press, Gweru, 1976.
- 2 For analysis of these figures see Marion Arnold, *Zimbabwean Stone Sculpture*, Books of Zimbabwe, Bulawayo, 1981.
- 3 Chenjerai Hove, *Bones*, Baobab Books, Harare, 1988.
- 4 Dambudzo Marechera, *House of Hunger*, Heinemann, London, 1978.
- 5 Tsitsi Dangarembga, *Nervous Conditions*, ZPH, Harare, 1988.
- 6 Thomas Bodkin, *The Approach to Painting*, Collins, London, 1945.
- 7 Jamila Hava, "Kingsley Sambo: A Retrospective View," *Insight*, September 1984.
- 8 Frank McEwen, "Introduction", *New Art from Rhodesia*, Commonwealth Institute, London, 1963.
- 9 John Craxton cited by Malcolm Yorke, *The Spirit of Place: Nine Neo-Romantic Artists and their Times*, Constable, London, 1988.
- 10 *The Herald*, Harare, 13 May 1984.

Editorial note 1: The complete paper was first published in *Commonwealth* vol 14 no 2 1992. Unfortunately a shortened version is presented here due to lack of space. Anyone wishing to read the full text can contact the editor.

Editorial note 2: The paintings discussed were not available for photographing so we have used other examples of the artists' work which we thought most relevant. Numbers in brackets are data tags for the National Gallery's Permanent Collection.

Affectionately known as Thomas Mu, Thomas Mukarobgwa¹ is a long-standing member of the art community in Zimbabwe. Pip Curling looks at his work & life in art over 40 years.

Thomas Mukarobgwa: memories of nature

Steffen Gieding



Thomas Mukarobgwa, (title unknown), 1995, 61 x 61cm, oil on canvas

Thomas Mu decided to be an artist when he sold his first painting for £40 to Frank McEwen in 1957. As a young man, Thomas Mu worked as a cleaner in the old Palace Theatre in Salisbury. One June day in 1956 he walked past the building site of the new Rhodes (later the National) Gallery and stopped to look. A black-bearded man who was Frank McEwen the newly appointed Director of the gallery, looked out at him. Thomas smiled and Frank beckoned him in. This meeting of two men, each in search of his own dream, was to result in an unprecedented explosion of art. McEwen dreamed of finding the art of the people of this country. Thomas Mu dreamed of something beyond his life as a cleaner. A deep friendship grew between them. While they walked together in the bush, Thomas taught Frank the ways of the Shona people. Frank, in turn, encouraged Thomas to translate his personal and cultural experience into colour on canvas. He also asked Thomas to recruit other young men to join the National Gallery and become fledgling artists of his 'Workshop School'.²

Born in 1924 near Rusape, Thomas Mu was raised by his uncle, a rural farmer. The young Thomas, like all Shona boys, herded the family cattle in the hills and granite outcrops. He spent the long hours absorbing the ways of nature and the behavior of animals while he played the songs of the bush on his *chipendan*.³ He recalls places

Thomas Mukarobgwa,
Adam & Eve, 1964,
70 x 100cm,
oil on canvas
(PC-9400-0189) ⁵



Sjoefter Gelling

where people used to sit and “look into the ground in the early morning”. His early understanding of nature and his faith in its perfection is that which motivates all his creativity. Painting is for him a recollection and a re-creation of a particular moment in a special place. He says, “When you remember something in your painting it stays with you forever.”

McEwen shunned the idea of formal tuition in his Workshop School. He provided materials and required from the artists a commitment to discovering their personal expressive means.⁴ Thomas Mu found his own way of handling paint; applying it generously to the canvas in long often parallel brushmarks of juxtaposed and interwoven pure colour. In his paintings, form is overwhelmed by colour. Where the colours of his landscapes might look unreal or contrived, they are no less than a distillation of the prismatic purity and the brilliant seasonal hues of the bush Thomas knew as a child. Resonant colour recreates the essence of the soil, the rocks, water and foliage as he says, “mostly when the country is beautiful”.

In Thomas Mu’s paintings, people and animals encounter each other in the mystical mountainous landscape of his home in the Eastern Highlands of Zimbabwe. The story at the heart of each work recalls a time when people were in a pure state of oneness with the land, animals and the spirit world. Frank McEwen said of Thomas Mu, “For years our best painter, he is a master of folk knowledge and ancient myth, a linguist, a musician, and a respected sage.”

When McEwen discovered the aesthetic potential of stone sculpture in local serpentine, he promoted it as the authentic art form of the country. Thomas Mu, like all the Workshop School artists, turned to that medium. Stone, for Thomas Mu is essentially another canvas. He translates the sensuousness of his painted brushmark into the surface texture of the stone. Where colour activates his paintings, the play of light on the subtly articulated surface of the stone, animates his sculptures. His chisel caresses the raw material of his sculpture with delicate, shallow carving to reveal the inner life of stone. Humans and animals merge into the stone which is their shared spiritual home. From the time of his boyhood, Thomas Mu remembers that “Sometimes when you come across a rock, you can feel your hair moving and the shadows welcome you to rest.”

Thomas Mu, unlike all the other ‘first generation’ stone sculptors has no followers. It would not be possible for another artist to access the empathy which exists between his soul and that of the stone. He has no ‘style’ or ‘manner’ which is reproducible. His revelation of life through art is too intimate and personal to encourage imitators.

Thomas Mu has remained faithful to the National Gallery where he still works. He exhibits and sell his sculpture in the National Gallery Sales Gallery. It is all but impossible to see his paintings. With the post-independence rush of dealers in stone sculpture, Thomas Mu the painter was neglected by the art market in this country. Recently he came to the attention of a

British art dealer who now has unrivalled control over his paintings. As quickly as the paint dries on the canvas, the work is shipped out of the country. His dealer supplies all his paint and canvas and each work is bought at a fixed agreed price according to size. He does not ask what happens to his work once it leaves him or what price it fetches wherever it is sold. Money is not important to him he says, only the freedom to have the materials to continue to paint.

The National Gallery has a representative collection of the early paintings of Thomas Mu but none of his later work. In July this year, Thomas Mu was sponsored by Stanbic as an Artist in Residence at the Standard Bank National Arts Festival in Grahamstown, South Africa. There he painted, played his *chipendan* and spoke about his work and its philosophical meaning. It is ironic that Thomas Mu is today known in South Africa, collected in Britain, but is relatively unknown as a painter in his own country.

Notes

1 The artist’s name is variously spelt Mukarobgwa, Mukarombwa or Mukaromba.

2 The early artists of the Workshop School were employed as attendants at the National Gallery where they painted and carved in the basement.

3 The *chipendan* is a single stringed bowed musical instrument with a gourd as a resonator. It is held in the mouth while the string is plucked.

4 Of the group of young painters who included the two Ndandarika brothers Joseph and Luca, as well as Charles Fernando, only Thomas Mu has survived as a painter.

5 Numbers in brackets refer to the recent identifying data tag given to all works in the National Gallery’s Permanent Collection.

Dear Editor,

I read with interest the responses from staff and students of the Harare Polytechnic art department to your editorial in *Gallery 2* and sympathise with the writers over the negative perceptions often expressed concerning the department's status. The correspondents proceeded to attempt to justify their department's existence by negating aspects of the Regional School of Art and Design (RSAD) proposal and by adopting a 'them versus us' stance. Particular vehemence is aimed at the two preliminary studies carried out. Far from being a waste of resources, such studies are essential. It is naive to assume that a proposal such as RSAD could gain credibility or attract financial backing without a thorough study of the relevant needs and issues.

The RSAD initiative was launched by the late Director of the National Gallery, Professor Cyril Rogers, in 1986. The following year a Netherlands consulting agency produced a feasibility study which endorsed the need for RSAD but reported only on Zimbabwe citing the inclusion of reports from other SADC countries as too time consuming. In March 1991, I was appointed Project Manager for RSAD under an agreement between the European Community and the Zimbabwe Government. The terms of reference noted the need for 'a thorough qualitative and quantitative investigation within both the public and private sectors of SADC in relation to the demand for a visual art training facility.'

A comprehensive study of the visual arts, their teaching modalities and employment potential within the SADC region was a primary requisite. How could we construct a regional art school when we did not know what our neighbours had to offer, what their thoughts were about the project or what their contemporary visual arts culture consisted of?

During the course of the study over 400 people were consulted representing the opinion of almost 200 government departments, universities, colleges, galleries and private companies in Angola, Botswana, Lesotho, Namibia, Malawi, Mozambique, Swaziland, Tanzania, Zambia, Zimbabwe, South Africa, Britain and the USA. Several hundred other people were consulted by means of questionnaires. The Harare Polytech was amongst those consulted and valuable ideas were exchanged with Sharon Dutton and other members of staff.

When I started my contract the project had the support of two influential and committed educationalists, Fay Chung, Minister of Education and Culture, and Cyril Rogers.

During the next two years Cyril Rogers passed away and Fay Chung was removed from her post. Without them, the project has not developed as well as was hoped, and no other influential person has so far shown any commitment.

One great impediment was the delay in securing a suitable tract of land from the Harare City Council. Following the withdrawal of the originally allocated site in July 1992, an alternative was selected and a formal request for usage of the land submitted to Harare City Council in September 1992. Despite frequent communication with the City Council during and after my contract, a response to the request is to date still being awaited from the Council and its parent Ministry of Local Government by the National Gallery. With some leverage and forcefulness from the top, the land issue could have been resolved without delay and the school by now could have commenced construction.

As long ago as mid 1992 the Bulawayo City Council indicated that it was willing to donate a piece of land. Despite the fact that a donation of land was never on Harare City Council's agenda and that their dithering had seriously delayed the project, certain officials in the then Ministry of Education and Culture would not hear any suggestion of the project going to Bulawayo.

The findings and recommendations of my final report, presented in March 1994, were intended to maximise the potential of the proposed school and to ensure the relevance of training to be offered. The rationale behind the RSAD project rests firmly within the needs of the region for an institution focusing on the advancement of the region's visual arts, the development of art theory and history and the training of artists, art teachers and designers. The potential of art as a channel for employment, income generation and development remains relatively untapped and unexplored. Graduates of the school would help nurture a fresh perception of art in the region and create a visual language and theoretical base which would articulate an indigenous view of African art history and practice.

RSAD was never intended to supplant any existing visual art institution but rather to complement them. The RSAD would differ from existing facilities in the following ways:

1. The RSAD is intended as a regional facility whose character would be shaped by the interaction of the cultures and traditions within SADC. Existing training institutions are largely national in character.
2. The RSAD would be independent and

self-governing which would afford it more flexibility in respect of policy and structure to meet the shifting needs of the future.

3. Existing art training facilities in the region are typically small, specialised and uneconomic. The RSAD would include theory, history and training of artists, art teachers and designers.
4. The RSAD is intended to address specific areas such as theory and history. A research facility within RSAD would draw together researchers who would begin the task of documenting our own history of art.
5. The RSAD would address the complaints of education ministries throughout the region concerning the lack of well trained teachers to ensure that art is properly and more generally taught in our school systems.
6. The RSAD would address the limited scope of indigenous graphic design, packaging and advertising by bringing together the best designers, lecturers, students and ideas from the region.
7. The RSAD would serve as a focal point for other cultural pursuits by affording concert facilities, gallery space, a conference venue and the like predicated on its regional character.

The aim to build a Regional School of Art and Design is attainable and needs only courage and resolve to see it through. It is therefore discouraging to see a member of the Board of the National Gallery (and incidentally an ex-lecturer of the Harare Polytech) being quoted as saying that she believes the RSAD is unnecessary. Does this sentiment reflect the mood of the Board of the National Gallery as a whole? If it does we may as well pack away our aspirations and settle for more of what we already have, which in my and many other people's opinion is not enough. If we set our sights low enough and undersell our hopes for the future then we should not cry when development and advancement pass us by.

In the meantime the Harare Polytechnic art department staff may feel a sense of relief to hear that, in the seeming absence of interest in the RSAD project from Harare, an action group has been formed in Bulawayo to see whether the project, in full or modified form, might not now be transferred to the country's second city. Recently opening Amakhosi's Township Square Cultural Centre in Makokoba, the Town Clerk of Bulawayo, Mike Ndubiwa, indicated that Bulawayo was on its way to becoming the cultural capital of the country. The Regional School of Art and Design might just fit in nicely with that plan.

Stephen Williams, former Project Manager/
Consultant SADC RSAD project

While the visual arts and culture in Zimbabwe get consistently sidelined (most recently with a Government directive demanding that our 'National' Gallery become financially self-sufficient through its sales shop), Margaret Garlake writes from a society that recognises the importance of its arts

Letter from London

Directors of public galleries, unlike theatre managements, make a big effort for the peak tourist season: at the beginning of August, London had a feast of first-rate exhibitions, all deservedly clamouring for attention. One of the most improbable was at Hackney Hospital, once a workhouse, recently a psychiatric hospital and now scheduled for demolition. In the interim, a team of artists set up installations in the empty wards, corridors and departments. Video, paintings, piles of mattresses, distorting mirrors, nesting boxes, a lift transformed into a padded cell combined, though no individual piece was outstanding, to create a sense of acute unease and dislocation. To wander at random through an almost empty hospital — a few patients remain — is a peculiarly transgressive act, calling into question the boundaries of freedom and restraint, madness and sanity, and the role of the artist as our social conscience.

Back in the centre of town, the Hayward Gallery had one of those shows so logical that one was amazed that it had never been done before. 'Landscapes of France — Impressionism and Its Rivals' set Impressionist paintings against the vast and little-known canvases of castles, wounded stags and above all, landscapes characteristic of the mid-19th century, to reveal how the revolutionary new art movement developed within the safe taste and cut-throat competition of the annual Salon. The Salon, which drew enormous crowds, set the terms of normative taste: landscape was very popular, often symbolic, conveying a sense of permanence: even if the subject is a ruin or a seascape, the paint is solid and indicates a sense of *gravitas*.

Monet and his friends showed in the Salon even while they were edging towards the small, fresh, sketchy paintings that focussed on the informal, the impermanent, celebrating the delights of the ordinary, as well as the trains and new roads that promised modernity and mobility. By restoring Impressionism to its unfamiliar roots in the 19th century French artworld, 'Landscapes of France' emphasised its extraordinary radical prescience of change and demanded a new appreciation of the Salon paintings that we have rejected for so long.

The South Bank art complex, to which the Hayward belongs, is itself in something of a state of flux. Richard Rogers Partners were

the winners of last year's competition for a remodelled South Bank. Their scheme involves an elegantly undulating clear canopy that runs parallel to the river, entirely covering the Hayward and its immediate neighbours. It swoops dramatically down to frame the Festival Hall, where it will mercifully require the demolition of a Sixties' terrace that slices the facade in half horizontally. Hold your breath and wish hard — it may even happen.

Not far away, across the river at the Tate, was an extended reverie on the imminent passing of our own century. 'Rites of Passage', subtitled 'Art for the End of the Century', brought together artists seldom seen in London, from the venerable Louise Bourgeois to the young Pole, Mirosław Balka. It succinctly demonstrated the forms through which today's innovators communicate: mainly installation and video. The nearest it came to painting were John Coplans' immense photographs of parts of his own body, in extreme and unambiguous close-up. Artists have always scrutinised the human body, often in its less lovely aspects: it is the conjunction of new media with the development of recent critical theory of 'the body' that makes today's focus feel like a tidal wave.

In order to view Mona Hatoum's *Corps Etranger*, you stand in a small domed cubicle around a screen set in the floor, on which a video film runs. It traces a journey through the interior of the artist's body, made by inserting micro-cameras into various orifices. Accompanied by a magnified sound track of the same interior, it was oddly compelling. The arrangements are more or less the same for all of us, yet they were almost entirely unrecognisable, as if that 'foreign body' had been transposed into our own familiar envelopes of flesh and features.

As for the 'rites of passage', the deep theme of the show was to propose the centrality of the artist as one who articulates and celebrates the rituals, both personal and



Jonah Butt/Marcus Leith

Hamad Butt, *Familiars Part 3: Cradle* (detail), 1992, Chlorine, glass, steel wire and white paint

communal, that mark our transitions from one state of being to another. Art stands, in this construction, on the edge of the known, the safe and the acceptable: its role is to make us see the world differently. Balka's *Remembrance of the First Holy Communion* was a life-size tableau of the event that conventionally marks, for Catholics, a threshold between infancy and childhood and a ritualised step towards the adult world. It is complicated by the replacement of the handkerchief in the breast pocket by a heart-shaped red pin-cushion into which visitors to the first showing, in an abandoned house in Poland, were mutely invited to stick the pins with which they were issued.

This ritual was omitted at the Tate; nor were the full implications of Hamid Butt's *Familiars Part 3: Cradle* fully spelled out. The product of his fascination with alchemy and its position on the borders of magic and science, Christianity and heresy, its great glass bubbles were filled with chlorine gas. The Tate had in place a complex evacuation procedure should one be broken: the implications of the hazard inherent in the marginal position encapsulated in Butt's piece.

No such dangers attended 'Drawing the Line' at the Whitechapel Art Gallery.

Henri Matisse, *Buste de femme (Sirène)*, 1950, 63.5 x 49.2cm, Chinese ink and brush (Courtesy Lumley Cazalet Ltd, London)

Arranged by the artist Michael Craig-Martin, it was an exploration of the visual eloquence of the drawn line from prehistory to Matisse, Leonardo to Lichtenstein. Seriously and anarchically ahistorical, it was hung with immense sophistication and knowledge to demonstrate a visual logic that united Tintoretto and Malevich, Ingres and Agnes Martin; a logic that transcended subject matter to present drawing as an act of human communication more profound than words.

The most respected of London dealers, Annely Juda, devoted her summer show to a most resonant and all-too historical moment. '1945 — The End of the War' (arranged in collaboration with the Denise Rene Gallery in Paris and the Galerie Hans Mayer in Dusseldorf) was a collection of 70-odd avant-garde pieces "to show what was happening during this memorable year in history", as she explained in her introduction. Its images ranged from a tiny, poignant figure of a prisoner enmeshed in barbed wire to lyrical depictions of the serene Sussex landscape; from a Calder mobile to a Picasso still life with a skull, grimly redolent of Paris under the Occupation. They were, as so often in this gallery, nearly all of exceptional quality and poignantly evoked the terror, the sadness and the invincible optimism of 1945.

Forthcoming excitements include the opening of 'Africa: The Art of a Continent' at the Royal Academy in October, as the centrepiece of Africa '95. Ancillary exhibitions focussing on contemporary African art and photography, new art from South Africa, textiles, calligraphy and metalwork will keep us running around the country, as well as conferences, music, film, theatre and literary events.

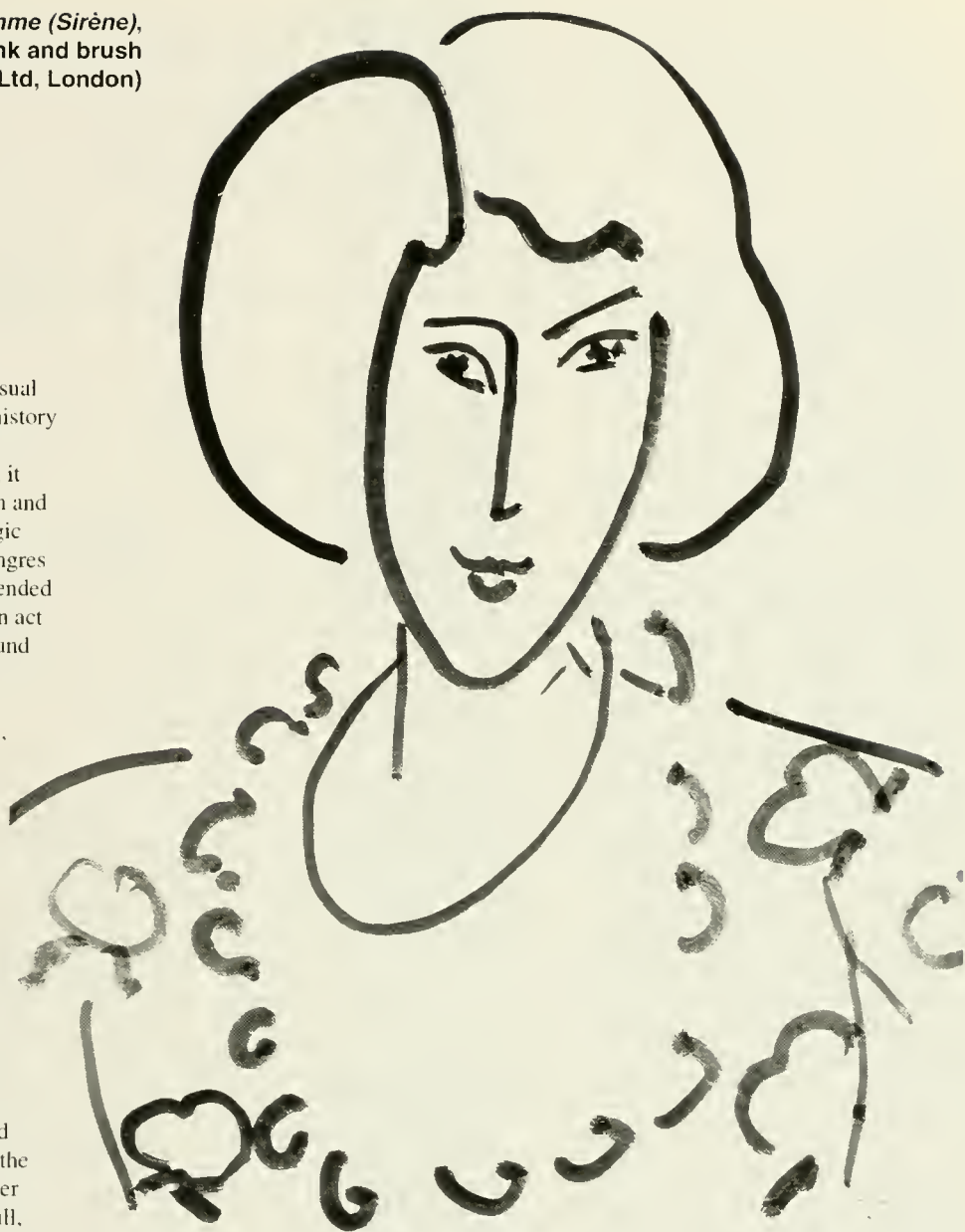
The Turner Prize shortlist — the artworld's equivalent of the Booker — is intensively scrutinised at this time of every year. The current shortlist consists of Mona Hatoum, Callum Innes, who makes large refined sparse abstract paintings, Mark Wallinger, a figurative painter much of whose witty and accessible work concerns his flesh and blood race horse called A Real Work of Art, and, for the second time, Damien Hirst —

he of the pickled sheep. The Turner Prize provokes passionate debate for and against: 'too much money'; 'not enough women'; 'it's all conceptual' or alternatively, 'encourages young artists'; ditto 'new media'; 'makes people aware of contemporary art'. To have two painters shortlisted is unusual and a pleasing rebuff to the frequently intoned 'painting is dead'; the Prize also focusses aspiration, brings vast numbers of visitors to the Tate — still honourably free to all — and singularly entertains us.

The problem with much contemporary art is its immense size, far beyond the domestic scale. In order to house it, the Tate is developing a redundant power station on the South Bank opposite St Paul's Cathedral. Bankside Power Station, not madly distinguished aesthetically was only completed in 1963 and was decommissioned 18 years later. In the first phase of the conversion planned by the Swiss architects Jacques Herzog and Pierre

de Meuron, tonnes of redundant scrap metal machinery are now being removed from its guts, the sale of scrap metal apparently nicely filling the financial gulf before the flow of millenium funds begins.

We are all millenarians now, if still not sure in which year it will take place: this issue, which is significant at least to the manufacturers of fireworks, has become a matter of furious and dotty debate in correspondence columns. Like the new Tate building, we are all in transitional condition and the marginality of the Bankside location, in a rundown area of south London, parallels the relationship between the new art seen in 'Rites of Passage' and the wider culture. The certainty is that today's outrageously new art will be absorbed as readily as the new museum will be incorporated into its soon-to-be regenerated locality. A little over a century ago those now revered artists and blue-chip bastions of the modern art market, the Impressionists, were in the same position.





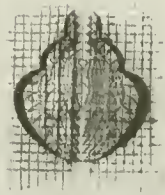
Horizons / Perspectives, Stephen Williams, Mpapa Gallery, Lusaka, June 1995

The recent exhibition by Zimbabwean painter Stephen Williams at Lusaka's Mpapa Gallery was uneven but included some exceptional oils as well as sensitively-rendered watercolours. Known for his large abstract canvases, Williams was by circumstances confined to small and mid-sized works. He clearly expresses himself most

Reviews of recent work

The Image, Thérèse Houyoux, Gallery Delta, July 1995

Over the years Zimbabweans have seen the work of many European artists most of whom express the angst of urbanised mankind. Thérèse Houyoux's works, executed with delicate precision, by piercing, cutting, folding and inking layers of Java paper, could not be more different. She offered us a meditation, in subtle greys, blacks and whites, on a fundamental image of life. She integrates the primary biological structure of the shell, the leaf, the spiral of growth, the fertile female, into one image which, through repeating echoes of its form, dissolves and mingles with the shadows and markings around it. Rendered calm by the nature of the work, the spaces of Gallery Delta led naturally along a progression through the developing images, each one subtly different, playing gently with the intricate allusions and endless variations possible within the single form. Music and mathematics underpin Houyoux' work and one viewer likened the exhibition to Bach's music with its delicate, measured and subtle variations. BM



We were able to see this work from Geneva thanks to the long friendship between Helen Lieros and Thérèse Houyoux. Helen Lieros wrote of the work: *"I have been privileged to witness over a time span of 30 years the research, the pictorial discoveries of Thérèse Houyoux. The different developments where the human element disappeared to merge with its environment and to re-appear, no longer as a particular person, place, event or object, but as an integrated whole where transition has been made evident with acute self-awareness. The skill to re-enact the drawings, patterns, images channel the power with profound quality, compressed energy and a sense of continuous disclosure through the media, all of them shaped by a peremptory statement. To discover and perceive, you are drawn by a chemistry and then all of a sudden there is a sense that these initiations manifest themselves in a sacred labyrinth, a series of revelations, a sense of fulfillment, an aura."* HL

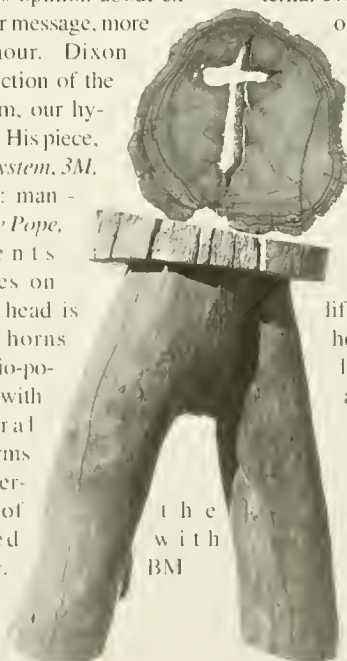
Thérèse Houyoux, *Image*

freely in his larger works, in this case the series pieces *Kubn* and *Makgadikgadi*, each of which was striking and also succeeded as a group. These were the only works done in oil on paper, with which he was able to create, in almost calligraphic minimalism, the depth of the African horizon, as well as the perspective and starkness of its landscape. Here, his concern with metaphor and impressions of place spark the viewer's imagination. Using layers of subtle colour and washes of paint, he evokes a sense of timelessness and vast horizons. The acrylic paintings were more academic. They worked as abstract explorations of texture but left the viewer searching for an interpretation. The exhibition was a welcome opportunity to view contemporary work from a neighbouring country. Hopefully it will be one of many. DH

1+1=1, Works by Rashid Jogee and Gerry Dixon, Gallery Delta, July 1995

Paintings by Rashid Jogee and sculptures by Gerry Dixon recently filled Gallery Delta producing a powerful sense of two contrasting individual visions. These two artists, each in their own unique way, express their lives and interaction with society through their art. Jogee's focus is internal; his paintings, an externalising onto canvas of personal experiences. The great sweeps of pigment, painted and overpainted to stimulate imagination and enrich perception, allowed or encouraged to drip and flow over the surface, invite us into his idiosyncratic world where emotions and thoughts are symbolised as markings and colours. With this technique, control is essential to maintain communication. This is not always the case. The small watercolours, filled with calligraphic markings, capture in miniature this same spontaneous outpouring of experience into colour.

Gerry Dixon by contrast is more cerebral, more concerned to express his opinion about external events. Each piece has a particular message, more often than not edged with humour. Dixon confronts us with our destruction of the environment, our pocrisies, our injustices. His piece, *One for the Pope*, comments on religious hypocrisy; when the head is devil's horns. These socio-political statements are a fine sense of counterpoint in the use of forms and textures, and a clear under-qualities of exploited sensuality. The materials which are remarkable



Stiller Gering

Gerry Dixon, *One for the Pope, Lion's Cross*

(Below) Lines rising from a recumbent figure transform into a creature with a snake's body and antelope's head. Marondera

shortcomings. His own comparative analysis is based on months of arduous and meticulous tracing by both himself and a number of able assistants. It brings together a mature understanding of the nature of art and a knowledge of recent and contemporary San beliefs and value systems. It thus offers us an insight into the perceptions and

Arthur Azevedo will exhibit sculptures, drawings and graphics at Gallery Delta from 19 September into early October. Zimbabwe's master sculptor in metal shows work that continues his investigation into the structural forms of animals capturing as he does so succinctly and evocatively their inherent character.

a n d forthcoming exhibitions and events

The Hunter's Vision: The Prehistoric Rock Art of Zimbabwe by Peter Garlake

The Hunter's Vision is the product of eight years of study and careful recording of hundreds of rock art sites in the granite country of Mashonaland, Masvingo and Matobo districts; it is a digest of Peter Garlake's conclusions, illustrated by sites and paintings almost none of which has been published before.

Without doubt it is a handsome book, well written and beautifully illustrated, and the British Museum Press are to be congratulated on its layout and design. While ZPH must be commended for making such an important book available within Zimbabwe, I find the local cost of \$365 very high (more expensive than many coffee table books) which will put it out of reach of many people. For those interested in Zimbabwe's unique Stone Age inheritance, it is well worth the investment. The text is extremely readable, with Peter Garlake's enthusiasm for the country and his subject evident throughout. Divided into an introduction and nine chapters, the book describes and analyses a long underrated art, and as it does so, breathes life not only into the paintings, but also into the lives of the prehistoric San artists and the society in which they lived.

This is not a guide book. In the interests of protecting the art from vandalism and theft, only the districts in which the individual paintings are found are indicated. This is of particular concern to the author, who considers Zimbabwe's prehistoric paintings one of the world's last and greatest undiscovered cultural treasures. This does not at all detract from what the book sets out to achieve.

Traditionally our rock art has been viewed and recorded from a Eurocentric viewpoint, few observers recognising it to be anything more than descriptive of the daily life of hunter-gatherers. Peter Garlake reviews these approaches, highlighting their considerable

preoccupations of a people who lived at least two thousand years ago.

The author demonstrates "that San art is probably as rich as any in allusions and evocations, metaphor and symbol."

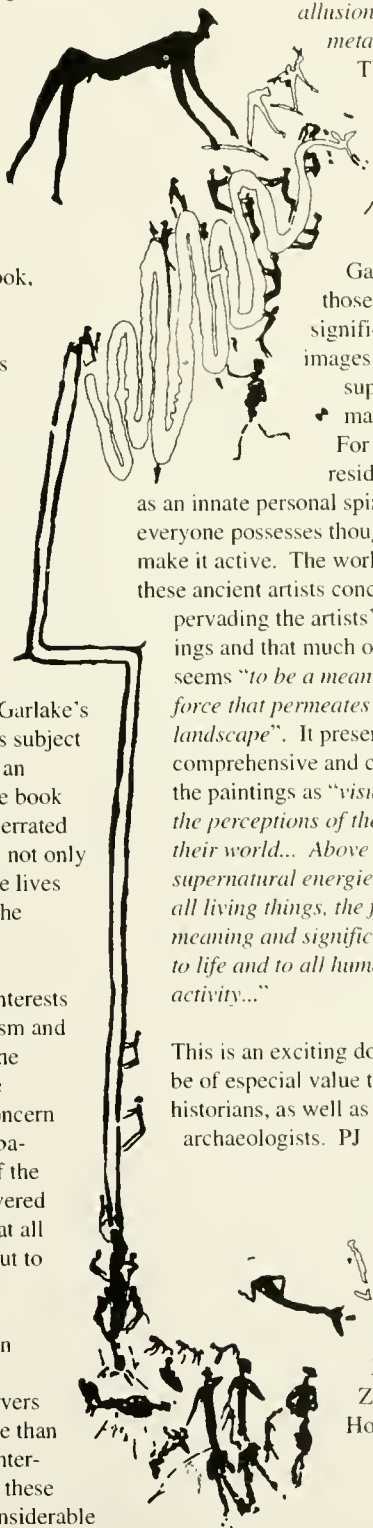
Through the idea that "one cannot read art; one can only explore aspects of significance," Peter

Garlake identifies those aspects of significance to include images depicting trancing, supernatural transformation and potency.

For the San, potency resides in the abdomen as an innate personal spiritual power which everyone possesses though few choose to make it active. The work demonstrates how these ancient artists conceived of potency as pervading the artists' entire surroundings and that much of their painting seems "to be a means of delineating a force that permeates nature and landscape". It presents us with a comprehensive and coherent account of the paintings as "visual realisations of the perceptions of the artists' societies of their world... Above all, they image the supernatural energies inherent in almost all living things, the forces that gave meaning and significance to the world, to life and to all human and animal activity..."

This is an exciting document, which will be of especial value to artists and art historians, as well as to prehistorians and archaeologists. PJ

The Hunter's Vision: The Prehistoric Rock Art of Zimbabwe by Peter Garlake, London: British Museum Press and Zimbabwe Publishing House, 1995, \$365.00.



The annual exposé at the National Gallery, the **Zimbabwe Heritage 1995 Exhibition** opens in November. The team of selectors this year have again pared the entries down from a mammoth 3000 plus and although the format and prizes will, for 1995, follow the pattern of recent years, we hear that suggestions have been made to the gallery administration and that changes should hopefully occur soon which will attempt to regain this exhibition some of its previous prestige and significance.

Adda Geiling, Simon Back and Nicole Gutsa will be exhibiting paintings at Gallery Delta in October providing some provocative insights into their individualistic responses to the Zimbabwean context. This will be Adda Geiling's last exhibition before she returns to Berlin to take up work for her Masters degree in Fine Arts.

On the 21 November work from **Henry Thompson's Nyanga series**, some 20 canvases which capture in resonant colour and bold composition the emotional and physical nature of a particular landscape, will fill the spaces at Gallery Delta.

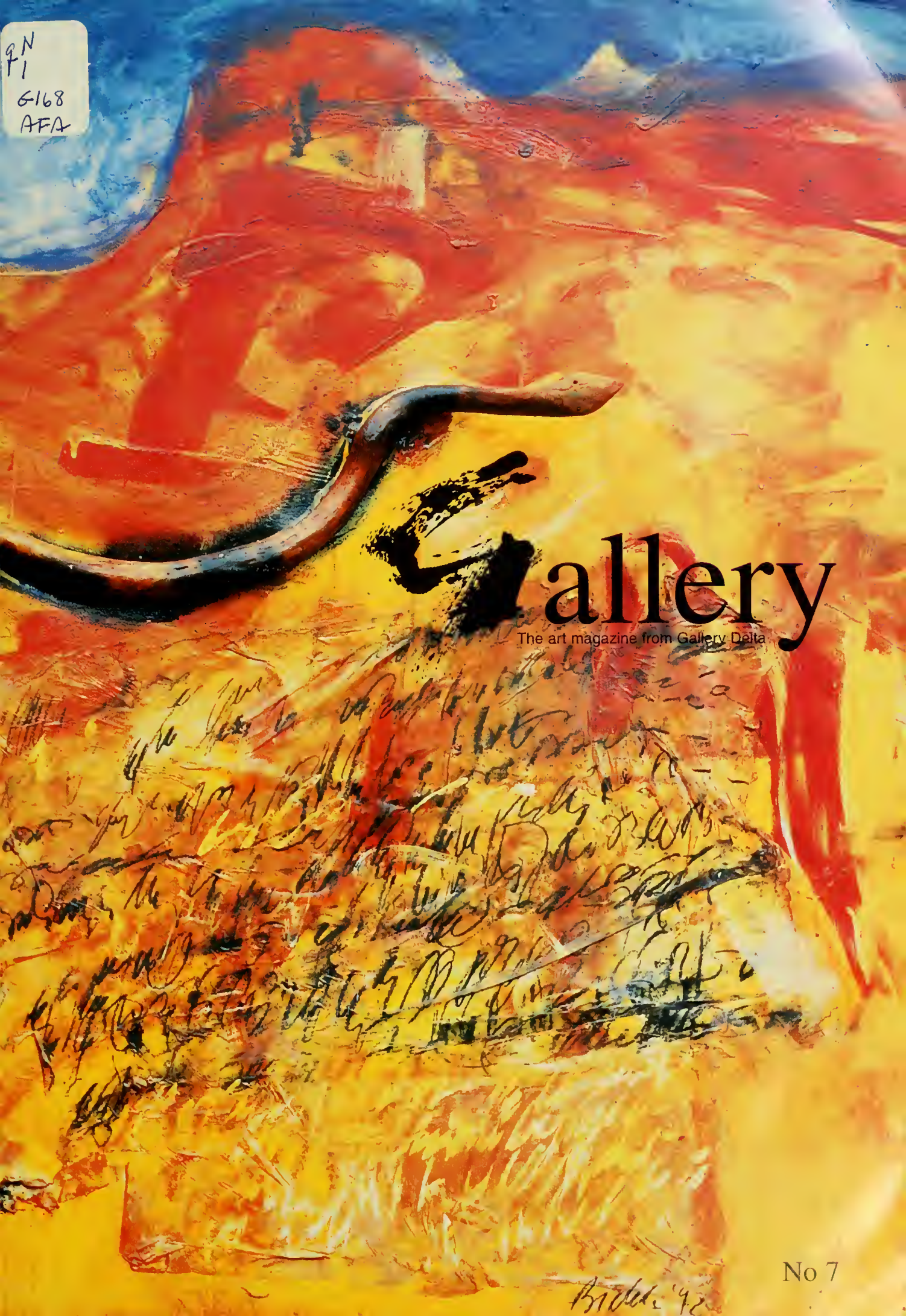
If you're going to California at the end of October, the Jessica Tress collection of work from Zambia, South Africa and Zimbabwe, including work by **Gerry Dixon, Tapfuma Gutsa, Richard Jack, Nicholas Mukomberanwa, Helen Lieros, Luis Meque, Stephen Williams, Munya Mudzima, Bernard Takawira and Tackson Muvezwa** will be exhibited.

Dominic Benhura, Colleen Madamombe, Agnes Nyanhongo and Jonathan Gutsa are amongst sculptors exhibiting work in the Chapungu Annual '95 from 1 August till 26 November.

'Genesis' with work by **Tapfuma Gutsa, Keston Beaton, Luis Meque** and three German counterparts, **Felix Droese, Jupp Ernst and Peer Christian Stuwe** opens in Germany on 17 September.



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The art magazine from Gallery Delta

No 7

Bridges '92

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Gallery Delta, the publisher and the editor gratefully acknowledge the following sponsors who have contributed to the production of this issue of *Gallery* magazine:



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Cover: Berry Bickle, *Pro Amore* (detail), 1992, 129 x 211cms,
acrylic & mixed media. Photo: Stoffer Geiling

Left: Marisha Pels, *Seswaa* (detail), 1995, rubber, steel, wire &
bone. Photo: Stephen Williams

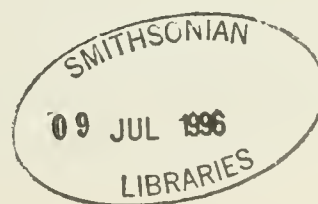
© Gallery Publications

Publisher: Derek Huggins. Editor: Barbara Murray. Design & typesetting:
Myrtle Mallis. Origination: HPP Studios. Printing: A.W. Bardwell & Co.
Paper: Magnoprint from Graphtec Ltd.

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Subscriptions from Gallery Publications, c/o Gallery Delta, 110 Livingstone
Avenue, P.O. Box UA 373 Union Avenue, Harare. Tel: (14) 792135.



Artnotes

“‘Who influenced you??’ asked a young white Zimbabwean with a clip-board project for a mind.

‘Everyone is influenced by somebody,’ adding the clip-board dogma (and most are so influenced that they never ascend to themselves).”

This quote from a recent article written by Professor Brian Bradshaw is strikingly relevant to this issue of *Gallery*.

Modern theory plays with the idea of the human being as a ‘construct’ of culture, consciously or unconsciously moulded by his or her social, political, ideological environment. Art being an expression of the human condition reflects this ‘construction’.

Anthony Chennells in his article looks at the ideological and political histories of this country, the resulting norms and authorities and their effects on art. Both perpetrators and ‘victims’ of any ideology are ‘constructed’ and art helps us to ‘deconstruct’ ourselves and our society. The insight he offers could prove a useful exercise both for artists in considering their own work and for viewers.

A review of art exhibited at Africa ’95 offers further evidence of the influence of norms, authorities and change on art, and particularly of the power of institutions and curators to determine society’s perceptions through selection and presentation of particular works of art — something we all could be more intensely aware of.

Sarah Pratt reveals in her interview that she is consciously seeking to unravel the ‘constructs’ of her existence. By looking at her personal family background and its wider context as European in Africa, she is attempting to form some sort of understandable identity.

Adda Geiling believes that artists can affect and change the norms of their society by making work which exposes the forces that ‘construct’ it. The system is there but can be challenged and hopefully bettered. She urges Zimbabwean artists to examine contemporary reality, to become more aware of the existing influences and to express a fearless interpretation of their effects.

There is no avoiding the importance of influence. No one would disclaim the effects of Picasso on the story of art just as no one would refute the influence of African art on Picasso — the artist as influenced and influencer.

Elaine de Kooning wrote:

“Western art is built on the biographical passion of one artist for another: Michelangelo for Signorelli; Rubens for Michelangelo; Delacroix for Rubens; Cezanne for Poussin; the Cubists for Cezanne; and Picasso, the philanderer, for anyone he sees going down the street. That something new in art cannot come into existence despite influence is a ridiculous idea, and it goes hand in hand with an even more ridiculous idea: namely that something totally new, not subject to any influence, can be created. ... Any artist, however, who looks only into his own life for his ideas is still going to find the irresistible ideas of other artists there.”

Most artists are happy to list those whose work they admire and whose techniques, approach and even content they emulate. But the great point of Bradshaw’s statement lies in that last line:

“... most are so influenced that they never ascend to themselves.”

It encapsulates a basic premise of creativity — the ability to go beyond the known into the new, to take individual experience and make something original of it, something that will enable us to understand a little more, open our eyes to other possibilities. The artist needs to get beyond the constructs and influences, aware of them, using them or rejecting them, making choices to break the mould.

As Picasso said:

“Now is the time in this period of changes and revolution to use a revolutionary manner of painting and not to paint like before.”

Evolution generally occurs gradually, experience shaping the direction of development. However this slow process can be punctuated by sudden change coming out of a significant realisation. Norm breakers in art are those who force society to see in a different way. We now take entirely for granted the breakthroughs accomplished, but there is always another to be made. If the artist is overwhelmed by the authority or norm, change does not occur. It demands a disturbing process of continuous questioning.

Perhaps what John Ferren has written is appropriate:

“It was not a question of knocking over other gods. It was a question of finding your own reality, your own answers, your own experience... We discovered a simple thing, yet far-reaching in its effect: ‘The search is the discovery.’ Picasso had said, ‘I don’t search. I find.’ We lacked the confidence for such an arrogant remark. We discovered instead that searching was itself a way of art. Not necessarily a final way, but a way.”

Within our own small system changes are occurring, a chance for new ‘constructs’ to have a positive effect. A director has at last been appointed for the Bulawayo National Gallery. As of the 1st of February, Stephen Williams is no longer just ‘temporary’ or ‘acting’. Events at Douslin House already show evidence of his knowledge of the regional art scene, his energy and his commitment to art. Hopefully, his influence will be felt throughout the system!

In closing, I would like to thank, most wholeheartedly, Stoffer Geiling whose photographs have been a major contribution to the quality of *Gallery*. His generous gifts of time and materials have helped the magazine to walk its precarious financial tightrope. Stoffer has now returned to Germany with his family and we wish him well in all his future endeavours.

Gallery survives and we hope this issue will encourage artists in Zimbabwe to examine their influences and ‘ascend to themselves’.

The Editor

UNESCO bursaries for artists under 35: opportunities for practising artists to work at various art institutions throughout the world. If you want information ask at Gallery Delta or write to the Editor.

In a two part article, Anthony Chennells contemplates the power of centres and norms in Zimbabwean art. This first part investigates evidence of post-colonial cultural fragmentation in the work of two white Zimbabwean painters. The second part will look at the effects of empire on the work of black Zimbabwean artists.

Empire's offspring

The Australians used to use the phrase Culture Cringe to describe their relationship with Europe. Culture Cringe implied that Australians were raw and unformed, their culture an imperfect replica of Europe's, and that the only way in which they could stand tall was by more perfectly imitating the metropolitan model.

White Zimbabweans have their own versions of Culture Cringe. One only has to go to Harare antique auctions to see it manifesting itself. Buyers who feel no obligation to distinguish mukwa from mopani would be mortified if they confused walnut and oak veneers.

In the last ten years, post-colonialism has become the rage in cultural studies and, whatever its theoretical limitations, it has helped to free us from a belief that the cultural productions of the 'UK' constitute an ideal and that all else is an imperfect copy.

Post-colonialism as a theory challenges the idea that cultural authority can be found *only* at the centre of one of Europe's various empires. At its most unsatisfactory, post-colonialism responds to this cultural authoritarianism simply by asserting the authority of an alternative local centre: whatever London does Harare can do as well. At its more complex, however, post-colonialism recognises that artists at the peripheries of empire command perspectives which the metropole does not know.

The very term post-colonial insists that all peoples living in the wake of empire, ruler and ruled, metropole and colony, are in one way or another the products of colonialism. The legacies of empire ensure that we possess, at the very least, a double vision formed from our familiar Zimbabwean experiences as well as from the multiple influences, banal and serious, through which we have experienced outside worlds.

Helen Lieros, *Anatomy of Rock*, 1992, 35 x 26cms, mixed media



Berry Bickle, *Pro Amore* (triptych), 1992, 129 x 515cms, mixed media

Steffen Gieding



The very possibility of double vision involves a subversion of the steady authority of the metropolitan gaze. If other ways of looking at reality are possible, then the authority of the centre is called into question.

Cultural nationalists want the culture of the former colony simply to displace the culture of the metropole. Post-colonialism however, theorises an alternative to the idea of centre answering centre. It refuses the idea of centre and therefore of 'norm' itself. If the metropolitan 'norm' is subverted, then the very concept of norm will be regarded sceptically (1).

In the place of metropolitan models and the faint echoes of peripheral imitations, we are in a position to relish the multiple influences which play on our lives. Two recent theorists write that:

"... post-colonial literatures take us from the monocentric into the polyphonic, from the dominance of a single culture into convergent cultures, from pure ancestry into hybridisation." (2)

The traces of empire ensure that many visions compete with one another on more or less equal terms.

The post-colonial model does not exist only in the tensions between colony and metropole. If the very idea of 'norm' is being questioned, then all centres are suspect. Most countries know centre and periphery through the tensions between capital and province, for in most countries the capital conflates political and cultural

power. Stephen Williams has played with this arrogance in an article in *Gallery*. He called his account of culture and politics in Bulawayo 'Sketches from the Fringe,' an ironic title, since, by the end of the essay, one felt that the fringe was centre and that Bulawayo has as much or as little right to be taken as seriously as does Harare (3).

Two Zimbabwean artists who reproduce issues of the post-colonial condition in their work are Helen Lieros and Berry Bickle. Lieros has consciously produced an art which confronts her dual heritage of Greece and Zimbabwe. In an interview in *Gallery*, she asks, "Am I Greek? Am I African?" Lieros identifies the form of her figures in Byzantine stylisation but at the same time she can think of the major theme in her work as "the earth, the discovery (for myself) of Africa, the stratas, land formation." (4)

In one of Lieros's paintings, *Anatomy of Rock*, Greece is present in a form other than the human figure. The pink, brown and blue of Zimbabwe's granite country at certain times of the year dominate the colours of the painting. The rock as organic is suggested in the rib-like lines which confidently mould the centre of the work. The painting's strongest colours however, are the patches of blue which surely recall the sea. One blue area intrudes into the painting like an inlet into land. The other, a painted rectangle of paper, suggests a window opening onto another, maritime, world.

Even while the painting is celebrating the colours and textures of the Zimbabwean landscape, its artist allows us to glimpse the sea which physically intrudes into Greece

and mythically lies so deeply in a Greek consciousness. The bones of the rock and the window on the sea compete within the painting as alternative centres of attention. It is as if Lieros, Zimbabwean artist, acknowledges that her art also allows the viewer access into that world which was classical to Europe.

Berry Bickle acknowledges the multiple influences on her work as consciously as Lieros. Bickle is acquainted with some of the most influential voices in modern cultural theory and these are given form in her work. Probably the most important thinker of the twentieth century is Michel Foucault and post-colonialism is heavily indebted to him. Bickle used quotations from Foucault in the booklet, *Other*, which accompanied her November 1994 exhibition at Gallery Delta (5).

She quotes Foucault as saying that the European tradition has become accustomed "to seeking origins ... to reconstituting traditions ... to projecting teleologies ... (feeling) a particular repugnance to conceiving of difference." In this quote, Foucault is describing the totalitarian mind, whether it is the mind of imperialism, fascism, Leninism, Apartheid, cultural nationalism or a European complacency which presents its social practices as ideals.

The Nazis and South Africa's Afrikaner nationalists looked for origins, as if origins tell us who we are now. An emphasis on origin allows us to think of history as possessing ends which are already present in beginnings. History is then seen as moving with the predictability of a series. Shaping



political agendas around origin and end (teleology) gives us the illusion of reproducing the logic of time. The envisaged end may be the German State, the British Empire, Pan Africanism, the worker state of Lenin's fantasies or a South Africa where everyone inhabited areas which their origins made appropriate for them.

Bickel answers these totalitarian constructs with wit and pathos. She offers a series of spoons which have no possible purpose except to reiterate their own emptiness. Someone is hungry. There is terrible pathos in her empty dresses, another series which has no end except the death that we all will share. The dresses have the horror of clothes stripped from concentration-camp victims. Looking at them one is more conscious of their emptiness than of themselves.

Two dresses within another series bear labels pronouncing difference:

"I don't believe as they do. I don't live as they do, I don't love as they do."

The third, which completes the series, is simply marked:

"I will die as they do."

The 'I' becomes all those who have been slaughtered for difference, for being constructed as 'other' in someone's belief system. But the 'they' ironically is all of us: even the most arrogant person, most certain of the rightness of his or her ways of thinking, will share the same death as those to whose 'otherness' they feel most superior.

One of the most important insights in modern cultural theory is the idea that all our understandings are culturally constructed. One way of coming to terms with this in art criticism is to think of a painting as a text. To understand any text one must understand the language and its symbolic references. No word can be fully understood unless one knows the cultural system it is part of.

In *Other*, Bickel quotes from Fanon's *The Archeology of Knowledge* to explain this in a different way. Fanon writes that his ideal cultural critic looking at a painting "would try to discover whether space, distance, depth, colour, light, proportions, volumes and contours were not, at the period in question considered, named, enunciated in a discursive practice."

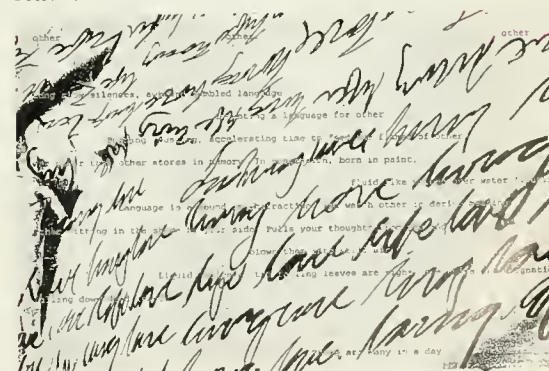
Bickel strikingly realizes this in a triptych, *Pro Amore*. An unreadable script scrawls across a panel vital with the brilliance of a Matabeleland sunset illuminating the harshness of the Matabeleland bush. Stuck to the panels are objects which signify previous attempts to inhabit that landscape: an opened fan, the wooden snake of thousands of tourist exchanges, a diary page, a framed photograph of a Victorian 'explorer' in collar and cravat, a tourist photograph of the Falls. None has any particular dominance: the British explorer and artist, the black colonized and curio maker have equal authority only because Bickel has allowed them to have it.

But at the same time, Bickel is denying her own painting the status of the final word. Because Bickel is the artist, she has the

authority to contextualise the various artifacts in the way she chooses but she knows the limitations to her authority. Part of her medium is the scrawled writing which admits to its own inarticulateness. I turn to a page in *Other*. A similar scrawl runs diagonally across the page but this time it is imposed on clearly typed words. We live in a culture which gives the written word a final authority. Eager for that certainty, I read the words beneath the scrawl and find:

"awkward jumbled language ... inventing a language for other ... in suspension, born in paint ... language is a sound in abstraction."

I have turned to the word for finality and Bickel denies me the certainty of what I believed was most sure.





Stoffer Gelling

Post-colonialism is concerned with the alternative vision of traditionally powerless groups. In our context we think of these as the races against whom colonialism discriminated. Bickle's triptych reminds us of other powerless groups. The ornate frame around the photograph of the 'explorer' reminds us that it is men who go out. Women constrain them within a pretty domestic space their femaleness is supposed to have created. Fan and snake occupy the same panel, conventional male and female images. The fan suggests how white women were expected to maintain the illusion of fragility in a hard world. The curio snake reminds us of the new economic circumstances which re-write the masculinity of a black man, reduced to creating artifacts for the tourist 'other'.

If we are to loose our Culture Cringe and stand upright, what is *Gallery* doing including amongst its offerings Margaret Garlake's 'Letter from London'? (6) Is Garlake offering us a validation of our poor provincial efforts? At the beginning of this article I suggested that London is as much post-colonial as the most far-flung former colony. Post-colonialism's preoccupation with centres, borders, norms and authority informs every line of Garlake's column.

The installations which make up the exhibition at Hackney Hospital "create a sense of acute unease and dislocation ... calling into question the boundaries of freedom and restraint, madness and sanity, and the role of the artist as our social conscience."

When Garlake describes how the Hayward re-contextualises Impressionists' work by juxtaposing it with landscapes from the Paris Salon "*which ... set the terms of normative taste,*" one suddenly understands anew how Impressionism "*focussed on ... the informal, the impermanent, celebrating the ordinary ... modernity and mobility.*"

Garlake refers to "*recent critical theory of 'the body'.*" We are accustomed to thinking of the body as the most stable of sites but post-colonialism understands better than most how aspects of bodies can be made the basis of competing ideologies. Much of colonialism was based on theories of skin colour. What bodies signify and therefore may or may not do is more than skin deep. Bodies in a heterosexual, patriarchal society perform the functions which that society imposes on them. The body of a woman who chooses not to bear children or the bodies of men and women in same sex relationships are seen as deviant or demonstrate in their practice alternative theories of the body.

Garlake claims that a function of art is to stand "*on the edge of the known, the safe and the acceptable*" and, in my dialect, to allow the grace of the unfamiliar, the dangerous and the subversive to enhance our vision.

'Letter from London' is important not only because Garlake writes with rare authority but because it reminds us of a paradox: London is an imperial centre in a post-colonial age. London no longer hands down

the law like some latter-day Sinai. Instead it is the site of innumerable transecting influences. London re-colonised from its own colonies understands that boundaries set around politeness and value are permeable, constantly shifting, as the voices from beyond, of others, of those colonised in so many different ways, assume a momentary eminence simply by asserting that they are there.

Notes

1. See for example Bill Ashcroft, Gareth Griffith, Helen Tiffin, *The Empire Writes Back: Theory in Practice in Post-Colonial Literatures*, London and New York: Routledge, 1989, p37.
2. Diana Bryden and Helen Tiffin, *Decolonising Fictions*, Sydney: Dangaroo, 1993, p33.
3. Stephen Williams, 'Sketches from the Fringe' *Gallery*, no 2 (December 1994), pp18-19.
4. 'Helen Lieros: An Interview with Barbara Murray,' *Gallery*, no 4 (June 1995), p14
5. Berenice Bickle, *Other*, Harare: 1994, no pagination.
6. Margaret Garlake, 'Letter from London' *Gallery*, no 5 (September 1995), pp18-19.

Attempting to understand the enigmatic nature of others and the identity of self is a continuous search of the past and the present for clues. Sarah Pratt talks about her strangely resonant etchings

Scratchings at memory

BM: The subject matter of your etchings is very personal — your family in their specific environments.

SP: Yes, these works are all family related. I wanted to re-create a sense of belonging.

BM: Why re-create?

SP: The works represent almost a lost childhood, something whole that was there and has gone. We moved to the farm when I was five and all my life has been centred there but the family has been breaking up with my brothers leaving home, then my sister, and then I left. We had a family reunion which set me off on this subject. Fowler says: *"As we approach AD 2000 and the end of the millenium, the 1990s will witness an increasing and increasingly morbid fin de siecle search for roots in the past, for meaning in what has happened in the Twentieth Century ... nostalgia at a personal level will consequently be rampant ... to everyone a family tree, to every place a potted history ..."* (1)

BM: So this is an attempt to make your own family tree, to make sense of your past and the people in it?

SP: Yes. I think that people are constructed by experience and motivated by memories of past events, they form a vital part of each individual. Memory allows me access to a place where recognition and exploration of myself as a cultural, multi-layered human being is possible. Memory is identity. If I can quote again, Stevenson said: *"The past is myself, my own history, the seed of my present thoughts, the mould of my present disposition."* (2) So my works allow me to piece together the past in a narrative sense, to explore aspects of past events. Most people are deeply affected by where they grow up. If I hadn't grown up on the farm I'd be totally different. I am working in terms of my memories of that time. You could call them interior rural landscapes.

BM: Your works express interesting relationships between humans and animals.

SP: Well animals have always been part of our lives on the farm. The geese, the bloody fish...

BM: Are they 'bloody' fish?

SP: Yes ... really! The trout ... my father and brothers are frantic fishermen. So my whole life I've been transported back and forth to



Barbara Murray

Nyanga. At that family reunion, everyone came back to the farm, from New Zealand, from South Africa and from Zimbabwe. They all came back and the men just disappeared and when you did see them all they talked about was fishing and what they caught etc. So my sister-in-law in this etching is clutching a trout because that's what she's got to look forward to, being married to my brother. Fish are going to be part of her life whether she likes it or not.

BM: She is holding the fish very close, almost like you would a child. She's looking away but her face is impassive, accepting?

SP: Yes, there is acceptance. She has married into that experience. When my brother catches trout, their daughter clutches the fish like that and carries them around until she is covered in fish slime.

BM: In the etching of your mother alone, the fish are coming in and out of holes. Why is that?

SP: I just wanted fish sticking out of everywhere. In some sketches I have not made into etchings, fish come out of the walls and even the roof. In another, the fishing hooks grab onto me, hundreds of them. Fish everywhere. Fish skeletons. Even some figures whose heads have become fish-heads. Women and family are subjected to the fish. The geese are just to project another aspect of my mother's life into the picture.



BM: The geese are her choice?

SP: Yes. She likes them. She doesn't like fish.

BM: So the animals dominate?

SP: Yes, they take over my parents lives, and mine too!

BM: And you resent that?

SP: No, I don't. It's just the reality.

BM: Although the people are

with the fish or geese, the viewer is never quite sure of the relationship. The people are surrounded by the animals but not doing anything with them.

SP: I like that. You don't understand the relationship. It makes you question the character. It adds something, not being able to define the relationship.

BM: Do you think of these relationships as strange?

SP: No, it's just one plus one plus one equals the person.

BM: When you did your thesis on art theory last year what did you concentrate on?

SP: Portraiture by 20th century women artists, Frida Kahlo, Alice Neel, Paula Modersohn-Becker, and I talked about Kathè Kollwitz a couple of times, looking at their portraits of women and their self portraits. The use of personal iconography is what I'm specially interested in and the problems for the viewer who obviously has not experienced that person's life. With all the iconography that Frida uses, you really have to read an autobiography before you can understand her images. This is problematic but it adds interest to the work, the fact that the viewer can't really understand her.

Pure portraits only give some idea of the person. I want to work with the objects that make up their lives. I think that a person's character is the result of all the experiences that they've had and their collective effect. So I try to represent individuals through experiences I have shared with them, expressing part of myself, and using the objects as symbols resulting in a narrative image. I am interested in narrative art, the story of a life.

BM: Which artists' work do you like?

SP: I like de Chirico's work. Grant Wood's *American Gothic* is my favourite painting. It's wonderful. I relate very strongly to that painting because of the defensive stance ... the 'this is my land' quality. On the farm you experience a sense of insecurity whether you own the land or rent it. With the land acquisition policy, you feel you don't belong. You don't know if your land is going to be taken away from you. The psychological effect it has had on farmers is very strong. There is also the insecurity that I feel of whether I can stay here or not. I need to locate a sense of belonging somewhere. It is so beautiful here and at the same time you feel you won't be here always.

BM: Your work then reveals the life of your family, captures their involvement with the land and the animals and the insecurity of their present situation. I don't get much feeling from your work that the land is beautiful.

SP: I wanted to express the Africanness of the outside, the intrusiveness of it. You can't get away from it. You can't close the door. There are no doors or windows. People are in the landscape, part of it, yet they are vulnerable.

BM: Do you see the African landscape as harsh, for example in one etching you use a lot of spikey aggressive cactuses?

SP: That etching is of my sister who now lives in Chiredzi where it is unbearably hot. She is fanatical about cactuses. My cousin is clutching one, getting spiked. When people are insecure in their environment they become attached to material things and in my opinion it is dangerous. The people are made vulnerable through clutching them.

BM: In many of the etchings there is a sense of intense emotion created by the objects and the surroundings but the people seem impassive.

SP: I am more interested in expressing their emotions through their environment, through the objects I associate them with, rather than on their faces. In the etching of my mother and my brother-in-law, she is obviously the dominant one; he is a dreamer.

BM: The characters are very stationary making the etchings more like traditional formal portraits where the person sits for the artist.

SP: I've always enjoyed that static quality, lack of movement. I want to present a set picture of my view of the person. For example, the etching of the dressmaker is of my sister-in-law. She is from New Zealand and I don't relate her to the farm at all. She lives in the city, hence the buildings in the background. Dressmaking is her career. I'm interested in how objects and your career shape you and how you cling to it, it's your identity. She is surrounded, hemmed in by her career. It is in a sense constricting. But it's her choice and that's how she portrays herself. We are formed by our choices. They create our identity.

BM: The patterning of the entire surface, like a textile, is characteristic of your work. When did that style start?

SP: Well at school we only did drawing and textiles. There was no painting. When I started at Michaelis, I was doing painting but in second year I began printmaking, all



Barbara Murray



Alan Allen

the different types, lino cut, collograph, stone litho, plate litho, screen printing, mono prints. They give you a sound technical grounding in both black and white and colour. Then in third year I chose printmaking as a major, specialising in etching because I could get so much more detail. I hate the flatness of screen printing and litho. It's the embossed quality and the preciseness of etching that I like, the control you have over detail. My paintings were also detailed, precise. The small animals and objects fulfill my need for detail. And I like using the many techniques to create different and contrasting surfaces and textures, waxy, soft, sharp, lined — fish scales, floor, fabric, flesh. The faces are etched in black and then pushed back smooth to get the white back, giving a softer surface.

BM: Do you work from sketches?

SP: Yes, not detailed, just rough sketches. In my opinion if you work from a detailed, planned sketch the result is cold. If I don't rework the copper it comes out too perfect. I try to rework, to use mistakes. My work is quite tight anyway so it is easy for my self not to come through, to get too tight. I think I lose a lot of feeling in the work if I just translate a perfect drawing onto copper plate. Also I get bored, just copying, which must show in the etching.

BM: What is your process?

SP: I do a very rough sketch first, just outlining composition. Then I etch and do the first proof. You can't really see what you're doing while you are making the image because it is a reversed process, so I go back and rework and rework until I get what I want. The smaller works take about two weeks of working and reworking. I'm getting better at making less proofs. Initially you're excited to see what you've done, but as you get more technically adept you can plan it more and take fewer proofs. My sketches also usually define the light source. Etching lends itself to shadows so I emphasise light and shadow. And I like the play with perspective.

BM: The distorted perspective adds an interesting element particularly inside the buildings which are European in style.

SP: Yes, I wanted European images. The buildings are European, the subjects are European, only the land is African. It would be a lie to use African objects. I used to use African objects in still lifes but now I feel they are not part of my identity. I can admire them from afar but they are not part of my own character. I am not involved in that very personal sphere with them. They are not part of my family and the experiences I've shared with them. My parents are attached to the African land, the birds, the animals. They are European, but they grew up here. I am a Zimbabwean but I have grown up around people who themselves grew up in Rhodesia, a separate but identical place. My parents' sense of uneasiness, not being able to secure a future in Zimbabwe, all those things accumulate, create a sense of defensiveness and looking back to one's own culture. If you're not secure, the other culture is threatening. We are affected by Africa and the result is that we look more to where we belong.

Any small community, say of Jewish people surrounded by a Christian community, accentuates and defends their own culture.



Barbara Murray

Contact with a culture that is not yours, realising that that is quite normal and fine, does not result in wanting to join that culture but rather in strengthening your own culture. So one accepts other cultures but identifies more strongly with one's own culture and the smaller the community the stronger the need to cling to one's own culture. The white community in Zimbabwe is not truly European anymore. They are products of Zimbabwe. They have their own culture.

Changes make you question who you are and it comes back to family, to those experiences and your memories of them. Much of the art now being produced by students at Michaelis is very personal in nature. People are trying to find a sense of identity and a sense of belonging. Memories help to strengthen the barriers around the individual's cultural identity.

Notes

1. P.J. Fowler, *The Past in Contemporary Society: Then, Now*, London & New York: Routledge, 1992, p161.
2. Stevenson quoted in E. Tonkin, *Narrating our Pasts: The Social Construction of Oral History*, New York: CUP, 1992, p1.

All reproduced works:
Sarah Pratt, (Untitled), 1995, approx 48 x 34cms, etching

Adda Geiling, a painter whose upbringing in former East Germany fostered political awareness and sensitivity to self-censorship, worked and exhibited in Zimbabwe for three years. Her experiences of the local art scene lead her to make this challenge

Art ...

"Take an object, do something with it, then do something else with it!"

This entry by the American painter Jasper Johns in his sketchbook, was over the years to become his personal motto. It helped him create a number of interesting and decidedly controversial pieces of work, such as *Flag*, painted in 1954/55, the first of his Flag series.

The American flag was at that time difficult to imagine as a piece of art. It seemed downright absurd. But because of this absurdity, *Flag* remained for many years the focus of art theory — discussed, celebrated, hated. Disturbed by the subject and irritated by its superficial harmlessness, the viewer was captured. The often seen but seldom closely observed object, the flag, became the focus of conscious looking.

Can a painting be a projection plane for confrontation with one's own country?

Is Fine Art not often described as a medium for everything that is 'aesthetically beautiful' and thereby clearly identified in its functionality?

Can you bind ideology, politics and art together? There are many answers to these questions, often of a complicated nature. The diversity of views on art forbids a consensus.

The Italian artist Renato Guttuso remarks for instance:

"Art is not ideology, but can experience ideological influences. Art is a vision of the world, not an instrument for conveying a given knowledge..."

Alfred Hrdlicka, an Austrian sculptor and graphic artist, has said:

"Without the nutrient and the raw material of politics, art makes no sense. Art has always been and will always be politically used and misused."

Whether art is vision or "what good artists make" (Picasso), in every case, art wants to be more than the interaction of colour and form.

Perplexity concerning contemporary art is great. In the face of the enormous over-emphasis of subjective experience, the viewer, despite the intelligent and fascinating arrangement of the content of a work, feels insecure and alienated. The basic problem remains one of approach. The artist, concerned with his individuality (since only that makes him an artist), assumes that painting is not a mirror, but rather that it arises from being irritated. However, the recipient is



Alfred Hrdlicka, Studienblatt zu "Plötzenseer Totentanz", 1974, 32 x 21.2cms, drypoint etching. (Photo courtesy Rasch und Röhrling Verlag, Hamburg.)

only prepared to a degree to let himself be irritated and follow the thought process of the artist. He will give up this effort quickly if the world of the artist seems too far removed from his own; even though the content is the whole point, apart from the formal, pictorial quality of a work. Nowadays the meaning of the painting is often ignored, yet it is specifically the developing of an understanding between the artist and the viewer on the content, that makes the work, at least for the viewer, original and exciting.

Meantime, there is an enormous freedom for the artist. The multiplicity of artistic expression has grown immensely since the beginning of the 20th century. The traditional media of painting and sculpture have been enriched by object art, installation, performance and happening. Everybody can express himself in any possible medium, going further than the two-dimensional, experimenting.

In this respect, Zimbabwe moves in traditional ways. There is not much experimenting, only a few artists seem to have discovered the challenge of crossing boundaries. Much work is made with sale in mind which, while not in itself condemnable, perceptibly limits creativity.



Adda Geiling, *Big Fish* (detail on left / complete work below), 1995, approx 2 x 2.5m, mixed media

and something more

If you added up all the 'spirits' of contemporary Shona Sculpture, you would think that Zimbabwean art is deeply rooted in tradition. At least since the birth of Shona Sculpture however, the recourse to traditional subjects often seems to be an expression of helplessness. Only a few artists reflect a contemporary existence or awareness (befindlichkeit); in most cases the art and the artist's own life are strictly separated. The problems in the artist's life are avoided and not used as subjects for his or her art. There is a great fear of confronting difficult subjects. It is easier to go back to the 'traditional' subjects. Only a very few artists are courageous enough to paint real and delicate issues (berührungsangst).

Painting in Zimbabwe has had an enormous upswing in the last few years. With Luis Meque, Shephard Mahufe, Fasoni Sibanda, George Churu, Keston Beaton and others, a new generation has grown up, with enough potential to develop their own artistic language. Still missing however, is the self-confidence to cross boundaries and to see themselves as the mouthpiece of serious social expression.

It was conspicuous at the 1995 Zimbabwe Heritage exhibition, that in comparison with previous years, more and more artists did not enter, with the majority of established and leading artists not participating. This left the stage to mostly young inexperienced artists, who in fact need to be confronted with the work of the experienced artists in order to develop.

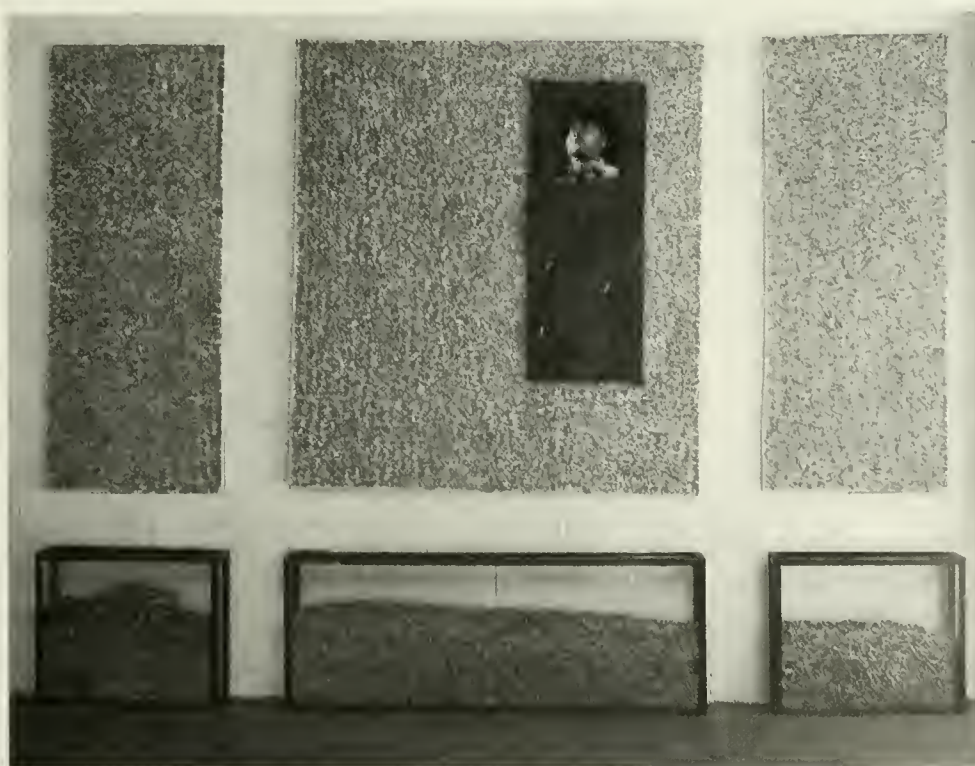
Reality for most Zimbabweans is anything but rosy at the moment. Many have to fight harder than ever for survival. Dissatisfaction grows, specially within the younger generation. There is enough material for committed art, as soon as its potential is discovered.

"Even if politics are decided at a higher level, the fermentation among dissatisfied people always provides political dynamite and a measurement of the mood because, despite their lack of influence, the future is often anticipated in the underground, at grassroots level." (Alfred Hrdlicka)


Art has an enormous capacity to reach into the future, to make it possible to feel what cannot be expressed in words. Art is in every case a sensor of its time — that is its chance, its opportunity and its special quality.

It seems Zimbabwe is still looking for its identity. Is there any better task for an artist than to participate in this process, to influence it, to make an impact and to represent his or her consciousness?

Note: Jutta Jackson kindly translated this article from the German for Gallery.



Steffen Geiling



Recognition of the richness of African arts was one of the aims of Africa '95 and while it presented some of the art from Africa it was inevitably limited, as Keith Murray writes. Now that the debate has been so successfully opened can we hope it will continue with more, in-depth, and well researched contemporary exhibitions from individual African countries?

Africa '95, a Season Celebrating the Arts of Africa — how to begin? A question that the London galleries and curators must have asked themselves from the initial planning of these exhibitions, a balancing act of space and budget against the huge diversity that is Africa.

Africa — The Art of a Continent at the Royal Academy was without doubt the exhibition of a lifetime, a chance to study under one roof a vast array of artifacts covering over a million

years, from the Olduvai hand axe to a Zulu vinyl-asbestos earplug. Inevitably the popular favourites seemed to be the most weird and exotic, the same driving force that motivated many of the original collectors. There is no doubt that works such as the Kongo nail fetishes have the power to evoke a visceral twist, even in today's most cynical Western gut. Sensual beauty also proved ageless, the Burkino-Faso chair drawing many admirers. The serene Yoruba terracottas and the masterly Benin bronzes fully justified their fame. And there were many new delights such as the Chief's stool from Tanzania complete with attendant guard.

A jam-packed collection of wonderful artifacts, the RA exhibition reinforced comfortable Western conceptions of Africa as exotic and remote. And where did Zimbabwe feature in all this? The Bird that would complete the unity of the national flock was tucked in the corner of a vast room, kindly lent by South Africa!

Chair, Nuna, Burkina Faso, 20th century (?), wood,
81 x 67 x 28.5cm (Musée de L'Iran, Dakar)

Hem Simecheu

Fante, Ghana, *Will You Fly or Will You Vanish? Either Way You Can't Escape Us*, c.1920, imported cotton appliqué



Africa '95 —

s k i m m i n g the contemporary?

African Metalwork at the Crafts Council Gallery was one of the few exhibitions to have an African curator — Magdalene Odundo, the renowned potter from Kenya. As the title suggests, a sincere overview of all Africa was attempted, and in the initial stages this worked well. Ceremonial regalia, gold weights, currency bars, weapons, implements, were well displayed, the only wish was for more information.

This exhibition ran into that old self-made dilemma, art or craft? It is a distinction that barely holds water, particularly in Africa, but has been circumscribed by administrators and bureaucrats to make their lives easier. (Does craft still come under the Ministry of Women's Affairs in Zimbabwe?)

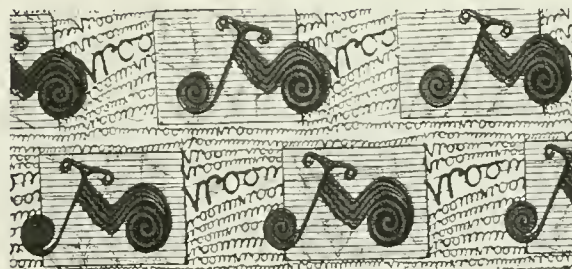
As exhibits approached the present however, the art content was sidelined. I have no problems with artifacts made by hand from recycled or scrap metal, proud that recycling has been part of the way of life in Africa for many years (the Western world has only recently attempted to move in this direction, with much 'green' trumpeting). The milk churns, containers made out of bottle tops, light bulbs turned into paraffin lights etc, are all very salutary even if their appeal in

London is one of quaintness. However when they are 'artistic' but technically incompetent copies of ghastly Moderne metal and glass furniture, I fear the worst. Including these last objects was a disservice to the superb achievements of the earlier work, and reinforced a view commonly held by Westerners that all of Africa is primitive and backward.

The Art of African Textiles: Technology, Tradition and Lurex at the Barbican Art Gallery, more than any of the other exhibitions, gave a feeling of an art form that is alive and well, with some outstanding examples both old and new. Passing through a specially commissioned Egyptian tent-hanging, you left the inhuman public spaces of the Barbican behind and were faced by two subtle and rich appliqué hangings by Chant Avedissian, loosely based on famous monuments and mosques of his native Egypt. The colours of these deceptively

simple geometric compositions, many shades of black, ochre, olive green with small highlights of red, immediately identified the work solidly with Africa.

The main body of this exhibition was loosely arranged by country and technique, with historic precedents interspersed. It was an intelligent presentation, allowing the viewer to browse and investigate. Thus an apron, beaded in traditional fashion (from the Kariba area), was placed near South African dress cloths decorated with dense arrangements of safety pins. A traditional cloth stencilled with an endless indigo repeat of *There is no King as God* was juxtaposed with a modern reworking of the same tradition, a cotton wax print repeat of a motorbike composed of spirals, the background completely filled with an endless *Vroom* — evidence of a vital tradition continuing from the past into regeneration in the present.



Akosombo Textiles Ltd, Ghana, 1995, wax print cotton textile

High-backed chief's stool,
Nyamwezi, Tanzania, late 19th
century, h. 107cm (Staatliche
Museen zu Berlin)

Kangas, embroidered and dyed gowns, cotton, silk, political and celebratory prints, flags, all were displayed with comprehensive historic details of how and why developments took place making a very satisfying and vital exhibition.

Big City — Artists from Africa at the Serpentine Gallery avoided the trap of trying for too much and gained by allowing the individuality of the artists to come across. After I had looked hard at the first twenty or so of his postcard-sized drawings, Frédéric Bruly Bouabré from the Ivory Coast had me hooked — entering into his world philosophy, complete with an evolved written language, naive but profound drawings that combine with the writing to present great graphic style, a commitment self-evident in the sheer number of cards on display: a series of series that have become part of his very life. In an interview in the accompanying catalogue, Bouabré says:

"Culture is the torch, the beacon that lights the way. Without culture, mankind would live in darkness."

He goes on:

"I observe and what I see delights me ... discovering things that would otherwise pass unnoticed and revealing them to your fellow human beings is being creative..."

Seydou Keita is a Malian photographer who has spent most of his life taking portraits of local people

in Bamako, his birthplace, always using the same camera, the same room, the same props. He can date his archive by the backdrop, his bedspread, which he changes every two years. The results are a composed, contrasted, crystal clear record of the people in the town until 1977 when he was pushed out by the advent of cheap colour photography.

Bodys Isek Kingelez from Zaire is, in his own words, *"the enlightened artist of new horizons, creator-maker of Kimbeville."* Using polychrome maquettes of fantasy buildings, towns, roads, trains, he has created a world that makes a mockery of many of this decade's architectural preoccupations. Highly stylised, they delight the eye and the imagination, and many are convincingly buildable. How many of today's architects can offer as much?

However, some of the work on the Serpentine show was unremarkable. The poignancy of an assemblage of found objects plus written commentary has to be very powerful indeed if it is not to be diminished when moved out of its original context; competent wall murals are to be found in many countries in Africa; and weak versions of Zephania Tshuma's caustic visions produced by a South African sculptor were among the works exhibited.

As a Zimbabwean I was looking for Zimbabwe's involvement in Africa '95. It cannot be a coincidence that two of the three Zimbabwean items I saw (the Zimbabwe Bird at the Royal Academy and the Apron at the Barbican) both came from South African collections. Even more damning is the fact that two of the curators, Magdalene Odundo for the Crafts Council and Tom Phillips for the Royal Academy, are no strangers to Zimbabwe.

There is no doubt that there are Zimbabwean artists whose work would stand up well against the individual artists shown at the Serpentine, that the work of Zimbabwe's best textile artists would have exposed a rich new vein at the Barbican, that Weldart has produced work that would demonstrate at the Crafts Council that modern metal-working techniques can produce real art in Africa.

An intelligent selection of the best of the varied arts and crafts of Zimbabwe, presented at an official level, would have been an eye-opener in London. With a bit of effort and enlightened support this could still be achieved.



Frédéric Bruly Bouabré, *The Couple United by Eternal Feelings Tortured in Twisted Embraces of Pure Love*, 1993

Frédéric Bruly Bouabré, *This is how Racism Destroys the Whole of Humanity*, 1993

Kagiso Pat Mautloa, *Tablet*, 1993, 109 x 43.5 x 2cms, metal, wood, oil on canvas



Reading the Landscape - Nyanga, Henry Thompson, Gallery Delta, November 1995

A few years ago I guided Brian Bradshaw to the Eastern Highlands. Bradshaw, that master etcher and painter who has, since the fifties, been the doyen of landscape painting in South Africa, wanted to see some good country, to make some sketches and observations for a painting series which was later to be coined *Bradshaw's Africa*. Late in the afternoon we were descending the hill to Mare Dam where I had planned a night stop or two from which to make excursions, and in the hope, at dawn or dusk, for the opportunity to fish a trout. Bradshaw suddenly broke silence and exclaimed in his broad northern accent: *"This is Robert Paul's country. Why ... why are you bringing me here? I don't want Paul's bloody country. I don't want to paint here. I want rocks ... I want Africa. Africa Africa. I want those big granite outcrops."* He thumped the steering wheel in frustration. At my direction we stopped at a cottage. I endeavoured to explain and promised him his Africa Africa next day. I unloaded my pack. There was an exchange of sharp words. He drove off, high revving up the hill and out of the valley heading back towards Makoni through which we had driven earlier in the day between huge granites which he appreciated. I remarked the intensity of his feelings. I thought I would not see him again and I reconciled myself to several days fishing. And then I realised he had gone with my rod and tackle. He came back in the late night and said: *"Found your fishing rod."* Then I heard him say by way of explanation, *"It's all Mavis' fault."* When I enquired who Mavis was he said: *"Well, you know ... the bloody car hire people"*, whose delay that morning had irritated him immensely. The next day we went on to Nyanga North, to Ziwa and Zuwa, and found good rocks and country and baobab for him to satisfy his lust for his Africa.

The lesson is obvious. Bradshaw was seeking the recognition of that special something in the landscape with which he identified completely. The landscape is vital. Not all will satisfy. Bradshaw's origins are Bolton and the moors and Wales and its mountains. Nyanga with its pines and waters did not satisfy and he had a very healthy respect for Robert Paul, the major body of whose work was Nyanga in all its moods.

Henry Thompson was bold, in the wake of Robert Paul, to take Nyanga — Reading the Landscape as a theme for a series of paintings. Clearly there was a danger, a trap to avoid. Henry Thompson is however, a white African. His origins are a farm near Kuruman on the edge of the Kalahari and it is there that his appreciation of the landscape began as a small boy. And it is obvious that he delighted in nature. He told me once,

over coffee, that his grandfather, whom he loved, had a deep love of the land and was a conservationist at heart who ran no more cattle that was necessary for the needs. And how, after a wild ride with his brother to an adjoining farm, the old man rebuked them severely for seeing the lathered horses off to water with a switch across their rumps. A lesson, he says, he has never forgotten. Henry Thompson was uprooted from the Kalahari and it is after many years of living in Zimbabwe and visiting Nyanga that he paints that landscape.

Does Henry Thompson succeed? Yes. Certainly and well. His paintings are still, calm and clear, like the clarity of the early morning. He would use the phrase 'champagne morning'. There is no specific view that we can recognise absolutely but rather the basic ingredients of earth and sky and rock and tree and grass and water and sun and light and shade are brought together from here and there and are familiar to us in their essence and in their new but lasting juxtapositions and relationships. How do we associate these paintings of an African landscape with Nyanga? Most importantly and almost magically, Helen Lieros comments, it is the line of the hills which expresses most and which wavers here, thickens there, wanders there. The centre of the exhibition is the viewer, around him the paintings, and if one allows the eye to move from painting to painting, the line of the hills, encompassing all yet freeing all, links and creates a panoramic effect. There are paintings which include the road, the bridge, the cutting, the long-grassed verge and bush and msasa trees, a building and village, a dismembered tree, rocks, and even the artist, and in all there is the line of the hills, not specific of Inyangani or any other range or down, but which secures us with a strong sense of place.

There is one painting, *September*, in which the density and shade of the blue of the hills is identical to the blue of the sky but mysteriously, because of the darker outline, the hills take on and appear a darker blue. And in these paintings we have the



Sarah Thompson



remembrance and the longing, of times past and for future times, for Nyanga, which for many of us is the place we go in good expectancy, for it is in the main, open and friendly, warm and embracing country, and to which we are drawn again by these paintings.

I have not watched Henry Thompson paint ... I don't know anybody outside his family who has had this opportunity if even they, but he works in his studio, taking excursions to look long and hard and thoughtfully ... and to make sketches of the structure of the landscape, abstracting to simple geometric form and I suspect that when he works he is thoughtful and deliberate, never wild, and that his markings with the bigger brush that appear spontaneous are deliberated long and hard and then put down with gusto and panache, as in *The Dismembered Tree*.

My own favourites were *Hill*, a masterly work which stands in the memory for its softness and subtleness of colour and light and its unusual composition, and *The Dismembered Tree* for the thrust and sweep and sear of the red that runs through it. There were others to which I was drawn ... a smaller painting, *Landscape*, in which the rocks of a kopje were evident and where the long grass of the savannah bleached white at the very end of the hot, dry season shines white as if with frost as the early morning sun glances and dances along it ... and reminiscent for me of crossing the

grasslands of the Somabula Flats at dawn on a jewel of another African day. Inevitably there were some which I liked less, for example the painting of the lake, the island and the rock which seemed to me less well composed and a shade too surreal.

Henry Thompson, as in a previous exhibition where he paid homage to Matisse and Picasso, gives us an insight into himself. There is nostalgia in his *Reading the Landscape* which depicts his old model MG in which he delighted to tour to the Kalahari and, as he once told me, to put his foot down and listen to the gutsy roar of the exhaust through the town of Kuruman at sun-up, but with which he sadly had to part years ago. And in *In My Mind's Eye*, he places himself in the country wearing his favourite cap and looking hard with squinted eye. If these two paintings are for me less well formed and painted, it is perhaps because they eschew a metaphysical edge and there is a poignancy in them, and if there is any ego, his desire to make a mark, to mark a place for posterity, it is understood. Surely he has earned it. He reads the Nyanga landscape very well indeed.

Henry Thompson is a long-standing and major painter whose rendering of the Nyanga landscape is his own and which stands our scrutiny. Most of these paintings are memorable and can still be called to mind. *Derek Huggins*

The 9th Annual VAAB Exhibition, National Gallery in Bulawayo, Dec-Feb 1995

Art in the Time of ESAP:

Directly outside my office window in downtown Bulawayo, a young man in t-shirt, jeans and dark glasses spends each day patiently awaiting buyers for his fruit and vegetables. Across the road, the post office pavement has been transformed into a flea market by women selling porcelain statuettes, toys, petticoats, kitchenware, jewellery, handbags and other articles. A few blocks away, the central parking spaces have been commandeered by mountains of onions and other produce. The streets are alive with the sound of free marketeering; this is the age of ESAP and the motto is sell or perish.

In the National Gallery of Bulawayo a not dissimilar scenario is enacted on a daily basis under the guise of Art. Agents bring sackfuls of BaTonga stools, doors, baskets, beadwork and drums from the Zambesi Valley, traders flash necklaces from Ethiopia and Kenya, sculptors and painters appear from Malawi or Mozambique, long-suffering crafts people from the rural areas wait with forbearance for audience on 'buying' days and paintings are taken from the walls of middle-class homes and presented in the hope that they are the lost and priceless work of some famous artist. All seek to convert something which they perceive as having value for that most elusive of commodities, money. This is the age of the great sell where aesthetics plays second fiddle to the grim reality of economic survival.

Enter the 1995 Visual Artists' Association of Bulawayo (VAAB) Annual Exhibition. The VAAB Annual is a juried show and has top billing in the two main rooms of the Bulawayo Gallery which are spacious and ideally suited to large format work in the mould of Baron or Jodge. The reality of this year's show is somewhat different though and, exceptions apart, marks a retreat to small, safe and saleable paintings and unremarkable sculpture.

Of those that do stand out, Rashid Jodge's *Madhouse* is airy, breathes freely and has somehow escaped the fate of many of his paintings which suffer from being overworked and dense. Other paintings that leap off the walls are Tomi Ndebele's *Blind Please Help*, Noti Thebe's *Mtwane "Nhlathali"*, Char Cooke's *Morning Light*, Sibonisiwe Cala's *Playtime and Images* and Val Broomberg's *Nude*. Various permutations of the Mzilikazi School style are included in the show but there is a noticeable loss of direction within the school with little evidence of the tough social commentary which originally brought the genre into prominence.

Henry Thompson, *Landscape* (left)
Henry Thompson, *The Dismembered Tree* (above)

Of the textiles, Sibonisiwe Cala's *I Need You Mum* and Gweru artist Clement Cohen's *How Did Life Get Here?* impress with their freshness and scale but otherwise the fabrics on view reveal nothing new or particularly exciting.



Sibonisiwe Cala, *Playtime and Images* (detail)

The graphic section is made up mostly of collographs emanating from the Douslin House studio and the influence of Mary Davies. However, this is another movement in trouble, its impulse having succumbed to uniformity of style, dearth of content and a noticeable decline in technique.

The metal sculpture genre closely associated with Bulawayo is conspicuously absent this year and in its place is a hoard of wooden sculptures in the style of Zephania Tshuma. A Tshuma industry has emerged over the years which began with the old man's immediate family but which has now spread to remote family members and even those who have no claim to kinship at all. Unfortunately the uniqueness of the genre has long been smothered by their commercial viability and only occasionally does a gem emerge from amidst the mass of look-alikes. The old man has not been well of late and his sculptures are rarely seen in Zimbabwe these days, most ending up for sale in Germany.

If the VAAB 9th Annual Exhibition is anything to go by, safe, small and saleable seem to be the catchwords of the times. The reality of ESAP and the messages of the new economic age for the visual arts are plain for all to see. With local patronage falling as rapidly as the value of the dollar, it is the tourist trade that is dictating the direction of our art and portable and cheap is what is being called for, something which curio sellers figured out a long time ago.

Stephen Williams



Methuseli Tshuma, *We share everything*

Decorated Homes in Botswana

Traditionally, in Botswana, the home is the woman's domain and it is her responsibility to build, maintain and decorate it. In this respect, art blends with everyday function, continuing a basic premise of African art. *Decorated Homes in Botswana* looks at both the history and the present reality of this tradition.

Women in Botswana use what is readily available (earth, dung, oxides) whereas, when men decorate buildings it is with bought materials (paint, cement) and is usually for monetary gain. Fascinating technical information is presented regarding the constituent elements of traditional decorating materials vis-à-vis their commercial counterparts. The book deconstructs the perjorative stereotype that Africans live in 'mud huts', referring instead to the geologically more accurate terms of clay or earth. The point is made that the morass of cement block and corrugated iron structures that are the norm in urban settlements are built by men and are often less suitable to withstand the extremes of heat and cold than traditional thatch and earth houses.

Emphasis is given to the origins of designs and the influence of other regional groupings such as the South African Ndebele and Pedi. *Lekgapho*, regarded as being the very essence of Tswana design, is given its own chapter. The pattern in *lekgapho* is produced without tools, utilising only the fingers on the courtyard of the *lelapa* (homestead) or on the wall of the house. The authors note that *lekgapho* is the one design not being continued by younger people but it is interesting to note that the cultural symbolism of *lekgapho* is a frequently recurring theme within contemporary painting in Botswana.

Illustrated with Sandy Grant's excellent photographs, *Decorated Homes in Botswana* is intelligently and sympathetically written. It provides historical background and draws in the broader context of the shifting socio-cultural patterns of modern-day Botswana. When research for this book was initiated, it was in the belief that the art of decorating dwellings in Botswana was practised only by the elderly and was in the process of dying out. The writers and the reader are thus pleasantly surprised to discover that the practice is still flourishing, albeit mostly in rural locations, and that young people are propagating the art form with a new and energetic vision.

Stephen Williams

Decorated Homes in Botswana, Sandy and Elinah Grant, Mochudi: Phutadikobo Museum, 1995. (Available through the Botswana Book Centre in Gaborone, Phutadikobo Museum in Mochudi and the National Gallery in Bulawayo.)





Alan Allen

Life of the Line —Luis Meque, Gallery Delta, March 1996

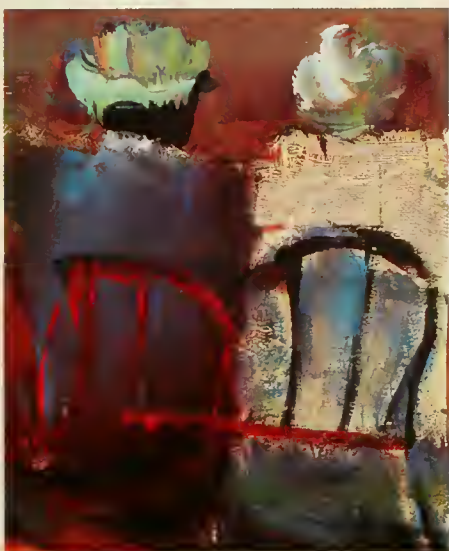
Luis Meque takes us on a fast talking tour, a tour cataloguing the here and now of this city, this land, Harare, Zimbabwe, 1996. He shows us the real life of these times — and he depicts it frankly.

His street people gesticulate at us from street corners, vendors stare at us with dead eyes, whores beckon us into their lairs, pool players sneer at our passing, lovers, enwrapped in their feeling are oblivious to our presence. He takes us through the bars and the shebeens to the dark side of the city



Alan Allen

Luis Meque, (left from the top) *The artist with The Poolroom, Lovers II, Love to Hate*
(above right) *Harare City Life*



Alan Allen



Alan Allen

where dull stares and cupped hands demand money, to dingy rooms where beer has loosened tongues and tempers. Throughout the journey he points out the stark expressionless faces, or the backs of heads — all anonymous people, united in their experience of existence on the edge. All survivors ... for the time being.

Luis Meque's paintings convey movement or lack of it — both expertly expressed through his wide bold brushwork (the exhibition might well have been called *Life in the Line*). He gives us the mood of these street situations, captures the spirit of the moment with his striking colours and simple strong strokes. Unhesitant, they show us this life — as it is — in your face.

The small works are snapshots, a series of "postcards from the edge". They capture single heartbeats in the lives of these survivors, himself included — snapshots from the frontiers of experience. The artist is caught up in a world of extremes and his

recording of these situations, these moods, these feelings, these places, these people all indicate a search. He searches with his strokes, his colours, searches to portray the spirit of the moment, and to understand why and how.

Why does love turn to hate with so swift and violent a red stroke? Outcast, standing alone — why is she nobody's wife? Why are there jobless people, fighting over money? Luis Meque explores the current political and economic times of the city and the way that these powers intertwine with the culture and the people. He portrays the belief of Africa's people and the mysticism of the land itself inextricably bound to the basic needs of the people. This is a hard life. A rough life. Luis does not show us delicate watercolour countrysides, or united pastel-happy families. He shows us the basics: strong colour, passionate strokes — life on the line.

Christina Lutz

Thapong — 1995 International Artists' Workshop Exhibition, National Gallery, Gaborone

After two weeks of heat, sand and insects in Mahalapye, the Thapong International Artists' Workshop uproots and translocates 200kms by road to the National Gallery in Gaborone, a venue which might have been purpose-built for the annual post-workshop show. At a stroke the sweat and toil of the workshop is transformed into presentability and elegance by the pristine white walls and floors of the gallery. A wonderfully designed building with high ceilings, alternative quiet areas and good lighting, the gallery is a curator's joy which has the ability to bring art to life.

The Thapong show is good this year. There are some exceptional paintings on view with the work of the South African artists Reggi Bardavid and Amos Letsolo standing out in particular. There are surprises too. Canadian Libby Weir's large unstretched diptych entitled *Kalahari Desert* bears an uncanny resemblance to a painting produced a few years ago by Motswana artist Velias Ndaba, while another of hers entitled *The Heat of the Kalahari* could easily be mistaken for Thapong founder Veryan Edwards' work. Are we witnessing here the healthy cross-fertilisation of ideas or just the commonality of place, light and time?

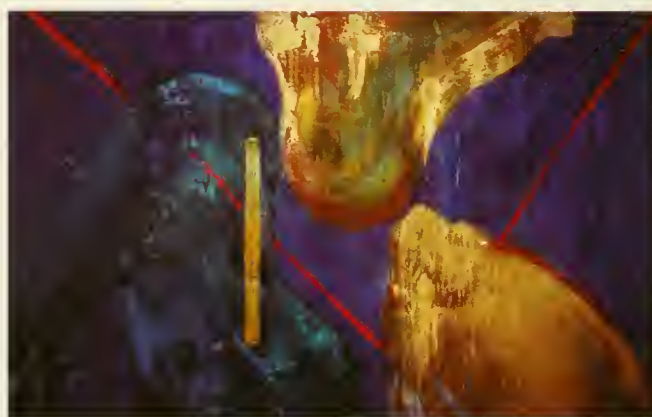
Edwards has produced some fresh work, far more purposeful and tough than the loose, amorphous style of her previous paintings. The mixed media floor piece by American Marisha Pels entitled *Seswaa* (see page 1) is innovative in terms of its media (rubber, steel, wire and bone) and for the fact that it breaks away from the constraints of art which either hangs on walls or ascends vertically from the floor. Dias Mahlate from Maputo has the strongest of the sculptures on view, his wood pieces, *Sonata* and *Dancer*, resonating with a tempo that could only have been produced by a Mozambican or Angolan artist.

In an exhibition marked by extremely strong abstract painting it was puzzling to note that virtually all of the purchases made by the Botswana National Gallery for its permanent collection were of lesser quality figurative work. A contrast was provided by the selection made by Motswana artist Philip Segola who, on behalf of the Bank of Botswana, selected much more innovative and interesting work.

Thapong continues to be one of the best southern African artists' workshops and, along with its satellite workshops which focus on drawing, young artists and women artists, has been of crucial importance in the development of contemporary visual art in Botswana. *Stephen Williams*



Stephen Williams



Stephen Williams

Dias Mahlate, *Dancer* (top)

Veryan Edwards, *Namib Journey* (above)

Heritage Exhibition, National Gallery, Harare, 1995

Exhibitions selected by large juries inevitably result in compromise and although the 1995 Heritage was a fair survey of much of the work being done in Zimbabwe, it was patently obvious that this was not the best work, better work being regularly seen at other venues throughout the year. But perhaps one of the problems with this exhibition may rather lie with the level of participation. A jury can after all only select from what is submitted. The current system of having 'invited artists', 'guest artists' and selectors showing work is detrimental and even they do not seem to enter their best work. Leading artists can no longer be bothered to submit work if they are not amongst the 'invited'. Commitment to participation must be regenerated if the National Gallery is to rescue the Heritage which is fast becoming a non-event.

Yes, the work was better hung this year with the fewer works allowing some breathing space. And yes, the work was technically competent but, on the whole, it lacked passion, intellectual engagement, ambiguity, complexity.

Amongst the works on this year's Annual which did make an impact on me was Bulelwa Madekurozwa's *Changing Skins* with its strong image and disturbing strangeness. A young woman, her face emerging from shadow, one hand passively dangling over a knee, stares out of a mask created by ritualistic daubs of red and black paint. This paint is transformed, becoming skin itself, overtaking her aggressively pointed breast and the lower half of her naked body. A black dog with indecipherable gaze and the foreboding darkness of the background into which the viewer is drawn before being catapulted back to the woman's eyes, combine to evoke a sense of the unknown. Colours, composition and intent work well to create a canvas replete with repressed violence and sexuality, the potency of superstition and ritual, and the psychological entrapment of the individual.

Another imposing piece was Berry Bickle's installation, *Urban Displacement*, with its drastic interpretation of contemporary African existence. Three stark iron bed frames are placed in formal line, covered not by the comfort of mattresses or blankets but by arid, barren earth in either dry sand or harsh red tone. The conflicting images disturb. In place of pillows, a broken clay pot and a rusted-through enamelled basin. In place of blankets, a covering of dry thorn branches. Now I lay me down to sleep? To sleep, perchance to dream? No, no comfort there. Rather an existence no longer



Berry Bickle, *Urban Displacement*

bearable, a sense of ultimate defeat. Are these beds or graves? Where once there was food, water, comfort, rest, there is now only the offer of death. Centrally placed on the wall above, drawing all into a formal composition, another dry thorn branch reaches upwards in a flare of desperation. The selected elements evoke traces of memory, shake out multiple references and challenge our complacency.

So yes, there are good works around but why do so few of them make it to the

Heritage? Why do so many of our leading artists feel it is not worth participating? A few members of the National Gallery's staff work overtime, to at least keep the National Gallery on the map, but they need support. Like Oliver, starving on pitiful rations, we want more but in this case we have to make it ourselves. There are no handouts. Energy, enterprise and innovation are hard work and depend on a genuine commitment to art. The art community as a whole need to help make the Heritage what we want it to be.
Barbara Murray

forthcoming exhibitions and events

The Bulawayo National Gallery, looking beyond our borders, will show an exhibition of paintings by veteran Botswana painter **Veran Edwards** in May. Also in May the public will be treated to an exhibition of work by **Mozambican artists**. This show is part of an exchange project which will also feature evening events at the gallery involving dancers and musicians from Mozambique. And in June, the director is putting together a show of work by **Young artists**, ten from Harare and ten from Bulawayo. The Bulawayo Gallery is also running a varied programme of events such as poetry readings, jazz, art videos and talks.

In April, the Harare National Gallery will be hosting an exhibition of work by French artists including **Antoni Tapies**, **Henri**

Michaux, **Andre Masson**, **Giacometti**, **Alex Calder** and others. Work by Australian artists in a show entitled **Aids in Art** will also be on in April. In May, **BAT Students** will exhibit, and USIS will sponsor an exhibition of work from **Bob Blackburn's Print Workshop** including etchings, lithographs, monoprints, collographs etc. The **National Schools Exhibition** opens on Saturday 1st of June.

Gallery Delta will be hosting **Graphics '96 — line and form** in April, to include work by **Sarah Pratt**, **Arthur Azevedo**, **Shepard Mahufe**, **Gillian Rosselli**, **Bert Hemsteede**, **Harry Mutasa** and **Mary Davies** amongst others. Work by sculptor, **Richard Jack**, will bring the show off the wall.

Mid-April will see the opening of a show of work by the group of young painters that have been nurtured under the wing of Gallery Delta for the last few years. These artists include **George Churu**, **Fasoni Sibanda**, **Hillary Kashiri**, **Luis Meque**, **Justin Gope**, **Albert Wachi** and **Stanley Mapfumo**. Their work has been able to develop immensely over this period and the exhibition will enable us to see the results of their ongoing struggle.

In June, Pierre Gallery will be holding a group show of work by the teachers of the Harare Polytechnic Art Department including **Sharon Dutton**, **Chico Chazunguza**, **Bulelwa Madekurozwa**, **Jane Shepherd**, **Kate Raath**, **Di Deudney**, **Mike White** and others.





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Gallery

The art magazine from Gallery Delta

No 8

Sponsoring art for Zimbabwe

Gallery Delta, the publisher and the editor gratefully acknowledge the following sponsors who have contributed to the production of this issue of *Gallery* magazine:



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Front cover: Keston Beaton, *Giant Ant*, 1996, 27 x 53 x 16cm,
found objects. Photo credit: Alan Allen

Cover (detail) and back cover: Hillary Kashiri, *Gateway*, 1996, 24 x
38cm, acrylic on paper. Photo credit: Hillary Kashiri

Left: Albert Wachi, *Body Music*, 1995, approx 1m tall,
springstone and metals

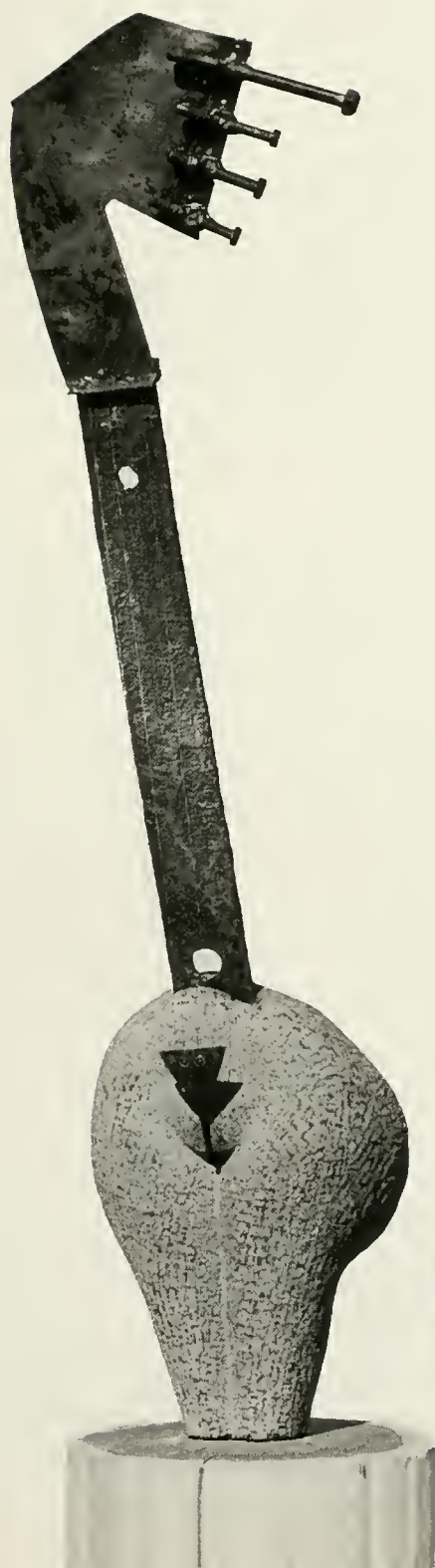
© Gallery Publications

Publisher: Derek Huggins. Editor: Barbara Murray. Design & typesetting:
Myrtle Mallis. Origination: HPP Studios. Printing: A.W. Bardwell & Co.
Paper: Express from Graphtec Ltd.

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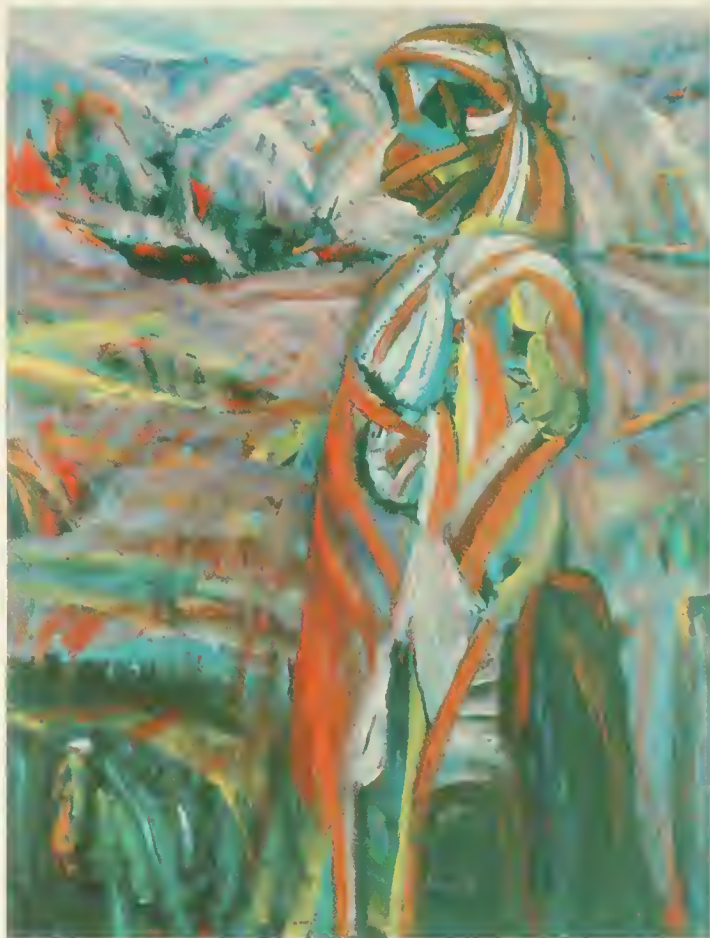
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editor.

Subscriptions from Gallery Publications, c/o Gallery Delta, 110 Livingstone
Avenue, P.O. Box UA 373 Union Avenue, Harare. Tel: (14) 792135.





Richard Witikani, *Domestic Workers at Rest*, 1996, 110 x 80cm, mixed media



George Churu, *Nyau*, 1996, 112 x 85cm, oil on canvas

Tackson Muverzwa, *Prayer*, 1996, 137 x 91cm, oil on canvas



Shepherd Mahufe, *Tired*, 1995, 108 x 82cm, mixed media



“... artists can be expected to change direction without warning, at great danger and in breach of the highway code.”

Andrew Whaley looks at the context of the developing identities of a group of Zimbabwe's young artists

At crossroads

It is not possible, not yet, most likely not ever, to put a dozen artists in a box and come up with a few handy epithets that explain them all. The artists whose work made up the recent Changing Directions exhibition at Gallery Delta are refusing to fit.

“It aggravates me,” says Hillary Kashiri, who, at six foot three at a loose stretch, would be difficult to squash into any kind of box, literal or metaphorical. *“I feel like challenging that labelling.”* Viewer, beware. This artist at least has a ‘Handle With Care’ warning.

Hillary Kashiri is more vociferous than his art colleagues about being strapped down by generalisations about where he comes from. In trade lingo, the description goes something like this: Here are young black painters (yes, they are described as black) and a few sculptors who have resisted the mainstream impulse to hack at serpentine, who went through the BAT art school, who emerged with a modicum of hope and who, by the virtue of their own bootlaces, thick brushes and a despair with stone, have found they can make work that meets the changing perceptions in the art place or manifestly change perceptions through their art. Theirs was a direct challenge to the

hegemony of stone sculpture. They have survived. Zimbabwe Stone has become ammunition in their slings.

But the questions that faced Derek Huggins at Gallery Delta three years ago when he was trying to stoke up a reception for these young black artists out of local art school, remain unanswered: Who are they? What do they stand for? Are they good enough? Responses then were not so much hostile or even sceptical; it was simply a question of, Where do you put them? How can they be described?

Not surprisingly, the artists themselves have had to face these questions much more acutely. They are, in one sense, a core of new indigenous artists working without the impermeable shield of a stone sculpture movement. By the same token, they have been able to avoid the overbearing spirituality of stone sculpture — the ‘mabwe machismo’ — that insists *ad nauseam* every sculptor is a prophet, every work a revelation. These artists have had to explore realms of spirit, philosophy and self-expression much more tentatively; building a vocabulary into a language. And in their own improvisations, the results have been faulty, clouded, gifted and epiphanal. These artists have had little hype to hang onto and

no guarantees that they could ever earn recognition or money. In this sense, they could not afford stridency and, perhaps, they did not feel they had much to shout about. The hand of patronage also restrained them from the protruberant forms of indigenisation that characterises a vocal, indigenous business elite.

There has been no direct attempt to appropriate this new core of black painters onto political platforms. Perhaps this is still to come. Yet it is precisely the artists’ sense of difference in a largely white-owned and white-supported painting world that has spurred them on to new expressions — a raging internal dynamic that is constantly redefining itself. In a majority culture the painters still provide the strains of a minority. The tendency has, therefore, been towards individuality. With so little consensus as to where these painters belong, the pressure for clarity, for the chance to be seen and understood has prompted rapid, zig-zagging changes in direction and focus.

In embryonic form, these artists embodied the New Directions at Gallery Delta. In a more mature version, they are Changing Directions. But to grasp the meaning of the whole when individuals are changing direction at speed and without warning is

like analysing why the 'tshova' ahead of you indicated right and pulled over left.

Art, like God and emergency taxis, moves in mysterious ways. But if you're inside an ET and have watched the driver flick down his indicator to turn right and then he deliberately pulls left, you will know — from the inside — that the reason is mostly quite logical and that someone has called from the boot to be put down here. Which is what the driver does. He obeys calls from within. He will not care that anyone behind him has just accelerated on the inside to within three feet of an oncoming calamity. The point being made here is that artists can be expected to change direction without warning, at great danger and in breach of the highway code. This is their right to life, their liberty and their only pursuit of happiness.

This brief digression which seemed completely off the point has really hit the nail on the head. If there is any common link between the artists changing directions, it is not that they are black or received training under the National Gallery's BAT workshop (which is as evident as saying that ET drivers must get a licence at the VID); it is that they have held on to the notion of art as way of life, of desire, of work — made possible certainly by the emancipation of which the BAT workshop in the 80s was a crucial detail.

Three years ago, form dominated content. The artists tended to paint life as set pieces, the equivalent of theatre viewed through the proscenium arch. Survival in the market place has helped to change that. Ideas have loosened up, been honed. A growing acceptance has brought daring, clarification and, most tellingly, a sharper articulation. This is a process in which a messy uprooting accompanies fresh insights. Tensions more rapidly assert themselves even within the fires of a single work of art. Choices multiply under pressure. Confronted by the bewildering possibilities of themselves, the artists have not shrugged responsibility; they have not run for safe cover. In fact, their work becomes increasingly a wild array of disclosures fuelled by discovery.

Listen to the artists' names: George Churu, Justin Gope, Misheck Gudo, Hillary Kashiri, Shepherd Mahufe, Luis Meque, Tackson Muverzwa, Fasoni Sibanda, Ishmael Wilfred, the painters; and sculptors, Keston Beaton, Crispin Matekenya, Stanley Mapfumo and Albert Wachi. In alphabetical order, they read like a school register. In reality, they have strong individual qualities, a latent sense of difference.

Keston Beaton, a sculptor and at 32 a virtual granddad to the BAT pack, sees the grouping of young artists together as "something unique". For him, it is a "family affair". "It is history," he says. "We grew out of that.

We have carried it over into life." The gallery workshop was a grounding. Being black and a painter is a common source. The extended family may be broad, problematic, even diffuse but it is also an umbrella. "There is no way that I could make myself an exception," he says.

The analogy with the old emergency taxi (pirate, tshova, ET or whatever you call it) may not be so entirely fanciful. These artists are not only products of sanctions, war, closed economy and structural adjustment, they are also "children of emergency", as I heard writer Chenjerai Hove once describe the way our self-censoring minds battled with three decades of Emergency Powers regulations, presidential edicts and constitutional tinkering. These artists essentially use water-based paints, poster paints. Oil is a real luxury. Some use PVA which they buy in hardware stores. They use fat household paint brushes and have no qualms about painting freely on bolts of brown cardboard rolled out of Hunyani paper. Costs once determined this, but it has become a kind of style, a rebellion against a so-called established order.

In a context where painters feel themselves to be out of known history — or maybe in the business of reclaiming lost histories — the repossession of voice and expression is a powerful stimulant, simply because self-discovery is so cogently allied to an entire society manifesting itself.

Their problem is not to seek one voice or style but to find the discipline that will contain many possibilities competing for expression. The artist may be torn between the urge to jot down anything and everything and his caution at needing to find an essence. This is a battle between expressive urges and a desire for distillation.

Hillary Kashiri observes the tension acutely. Politely brushing off the hand of patronage, he realises the quandary of the artist who is himself the subject of conflicting attentions; who falls prey to contesting ideologies; who has been claimed by others. "I have been owned," he confesses. "I have been. But as you grow and mature, you look into yourself. I had to stand up and say: Who am I painting for? What am I? I've got to be myself now. I feel as artists we have to look into ourselves first — before art."

It is only through art that the self, which pre-existed art, can be reclaimed. That which was once purely, abundantly expressive must be re-discovered via the relative world of expression. This suggests that art is an acknowledgement of Original Sin in a Christian world, a realisation that part of ourselves which was whole, has been lost. But the process of re-discovery changes what was there in the first place and begs the question that it was ever there at all. In our



Luis Meque, *Me and My Land*, 1996, 108 x 83cm, mixed media



Hillary Kashiri, *Mukuvisi*, 1996, 112 x 81cm, acrylic on canvas

Zimbabwean context, the parallel between Original Sin and colonisation is clear. But does this assume that colonisation, like sin, was pre-ordained, a miserable *fait accompli*? Or that a post-independent artist is forced to come to terms with the fact of history? Whether the artist's battle is with the stain of sin or with the taint of colonisation or both, work changes everything. What the artist imagines can be restored of the pre-colonised self is transformed by the act of seeking. Thus, Witikani is not painting a traditional hut in a field of grass. He paints what later you see is a hut, from the path as he walks, from his point of view, at a pace that feels rhythmic and right. Like the other painters in this disparate group, his work represents a return to self, one that is not burdened by the screech and trauma of an outsider's view of the colonised. The painters, like Witikani, are making no claims for a dramatic return to tradition or bottomline spiritual virtues espoused by a body of male sculptors. In many ways, these painters cling to the little values, honest assessments, understatement, a feminine principle that stresses tiny bursts of light and emotion — the miracle of re-inventing self. These painters, much more than the sculptors who are famous, are overthrowing the dominant creeds and overweening teleologies of our times. And they are doing it right in front of our eyes.

They struggle against censorious attitudes, disbelieving families and their own fear of stalling before expression has taken shape. Miraculously — and this has only happened in the last two years — this bunch of artists has begun to get away from us, from themselves. The emergency artists are up and running and flouting the rules of the road.

Ishmael Wilfred is an artist who goes his own way. He pays no heed to rules of form or line or composition. Yet his own combination is often bewildering and quite brilliant. Wilfred obeys the voice from within. Difficult to comprehend from the outside, his works are luminous tales of survival. *Riding*, with its strutting, triumphant riders has the exuberant quality of jockeys in a race but it is only when you see them as witches on hyena-back that they become witty, dangerous flyers. Wilfred's taste for the ghoulish comes straight out of dreams. *Cannibal After a Head* is the painter's fascination for a story he read in the paper. There is a sense of interpretation here. But in *Two Tokoloshe* — where he struggles with form to quell the demons of the night — and in *Red Cat*, which is a one-on-one battle with life and consciousness, Wilfred engages his dreams.

Red Cat was a real-life prophetic dream. He knew that the alien animal meant trouble — and a n'anga confirmed the fear. "Where in life have you ever seen a red cat?" In his

case, it was the signal that he was ill. A cancer had broken out in his face and Wilfred has had to have most of his jaw removed.

For the artist, painting *Red Cat* was not just soothing therapy; it was an exorcism. I asked him: Did he feel better when he had painted it? He answered: "Yes," emphatically. Was he now better then? I asked. He said he was. Did this mean that by painting he had painted the red cat out of himself? His nod was final: "Out," he said.

The interesting thing is that the painting superimposes the dream. Its reality becomes more demanding and tangible than the dream itself. I asked Wilfred what he felt about the painting now. He said that the thought of the red cat still pained him but it could not trouble him. But when he closes his eyes and imagines the painting everything fades except the red cat which, although only a small part of the picture, is branded red hot on the memory's retina.

By uprooting these dream messengers and planting them in paint, Ishmael Wilfred finds clarity in the turbulence. The red cat which stalks the dreamer can be studied for the first time. It has to be explained and, in so doing, it becomes the mulch for story and myth which the artist must speak about. Wilfred simply wants to "pass the message onto them." Through paint he can unearth "things I could not speak about."

The artist as story-teller is probably a key to much good art. In the emergence of these young artists the desire to tell a story is keen. Luis Meque, hailed as leader of the BAT pack, has realised the economy of story-telling, reducing recent pieces to a few slashes, a black cloud, a furious presence, a mood, a swipe at a woman, some whiplash of anger. This is the frustration at not being understood, at not understanding. Meque's work, more than any of the others, is a shout — as if, in the simple expulsion of air and emotion, meaning is better expressed. The feeling one gets from Meque is that he is pretty cheesed off with nice, elegant outpourings. He's broken out of a civilised skin that kept him admirably composed and unleashed a wizardry. He is able to get the feeling, the pleasure, the pain or whatever it is, and master it and slap it down. If he was one of those karate performers, he'd be breaking bricks.

A similar desire is there in Hillary Kashiri but his painting agonises over the perfecting of it. Unlike Ishmael Wilfred who has found painting can be medicine or Meque who puts feelings down in colour, Kashiri has not yet found a way to reconcile the privacy of subject and colour with public display. In many ways, he is the romantic of the group who sees dazzling light inside dark showers. He wants to paint the storm where Meque



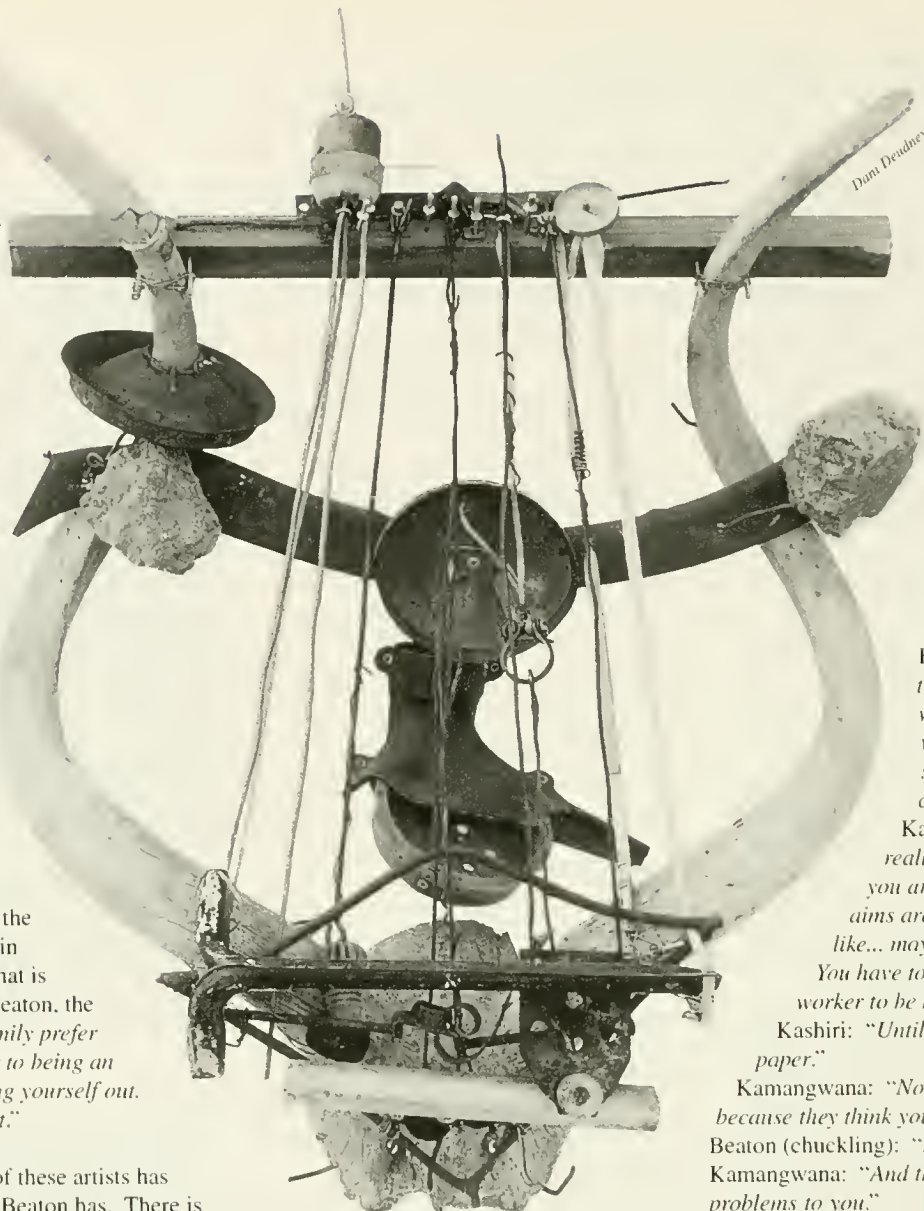
Alan Allen



Alan Allen

(top) Ishmael Wilfred, *The Red Cat*, 1996, 80 x 60cm, mixed media
(above) Ishmael Wilfred, *Two Tokoloshe*, 1996, 59 x 39cm, mixed media

**Keston Beaton,
Harp, 1995, approx.
70 x 60cm,
found objects**



has learned to be it. Kashiri is candid about the struggle: *"I am going through a process. I am growing up. I am trying to make a way for myself, make a road where there was no road."*

In opening up the way, the artists face themselves in front of a community that is sceptical. As Keston Beaton, the sculptor, remarks: *"Family prefer you being a bank teller to being an artist. You have to bring yourself out. It's you who is an artist."*

In as much as anyone of these artists has found the way, Keston Beaton has. There is a kind, lyrical quality to all his work that embraces common sense, poetry and toughness. Beaton specialises in making musical instruments, often wind instruments. He makes insects as well — all out of found objects. These are truly works of reclamation requiring courage and practicality. His pieces fly. They sing. *"It's almost the same as music,"* he says. *"If you are an artist, you are trying to do the same thing as being a musician ... You want it to be a sculpture. You want to sound differently — but in a visual way."*

A way of seeing clicked into place when he discovered the work of British sculptor, Ann Carrington. Good examples unlock the craft and focus the vision. With Beaton, interestingly, it is a question of the artist turning himself inside out. He talks poetically about *"inside and outside"* as if this is a metaphor for all the artist's lives.

"There are examples in history. Some were as crazy as they wanted to be, others have lost the way."

And him — af? He answers with no hint of the born-again at his back (thank God): *"I have seen the light."*

Beaton describes the artist's experience as like a day. *"In the middle of the morning, it's the same sun as it was at dawn. It's how to make the day out of your sunrise. You say, let me start my day afresh. It's a matter of making it a full day."*

For Beaton, man is, without a shadow of doubt, in the middle of creation. He makes, he does, he creates. Some days are *"on-off"* but every day is a creation best made the most of. And, if plain facts are wanted, the spiritual path can never be left. Beaton's works are not great sellers in the market perhaps because they are viewed as whimsy not as fine examples of the actualised self.

It may be interesting to end with snippets of a conversation between some of these individuals about their position as artists among family, community, society. There is Hillary Kashiri, Keston Beaton, a silent Ishmael Wilfred and the young Charles Kamangwana, a versatile artist at the edge of the road, trying to flag down our artist's 'tshova'.

Kashiri: *"It is very difficult to talk about my work in our community. The best time is*

when you have a drink with a fellow artist."

Beaton: *"Some of these guys we drink with have no idea what we do. We are schizophrenic ... criminal,"* (He laughs.)

Kamangwana: *"Nobody really understands what you are doing, what your aims are, what your life is like... maybe it's colonisation. You have to be a white collar worker to be taken seriously."*

Kashiri: *"Until they see you in the paper."*

Kamangwana: *"Now the reverse comes, because they think you have millions."*

Beaton (chuckling): *"Drinks all round!"*

Kamangwana: *"And they refer all their problems to you."*

Kashiri: *"They think you've got more than they have. People relate to role models."*

The conversation veers into the absurd, about how to detect an artist. Does an artist look like he has the light in him. Mostly, the artists agree that what's inside, that which makes you create, is often camouflaged behind a very dull face. People don't suspect the artist in you. There is much hilarity at this kind of pantomime. And then we start talking about what is inside and how difficult it can be to make sense of it.

One thing is clear, all these artists want to be seen and heard. They crave exposure — for themselves, sure, but also for the *"light"* they have seen or experienced. As Ishmael Wilfred looked on, quietly, knowingly, Keston Beaton the poet had this to say:

"I want to get exposed, not frustrated. People have lived with slowness and there is no way you can rush it ... Yes, recognition ... but I don't panic, I don't shake or feel insecure because I feel there's recognition somewhere, some day."

Yes, there is. And probably sooner than anyone thought.

Post-colonialism as it is used in cultural studies means everything which happens after the first colonial impacts. According to this theory, post-colonialism continues after independence since although the state is independent, it has been radically altered. In this second part of his article, Anthony Chennells looks at post-colonial influence in the work of black Zimbabwean artists.

Empire's offspring 2

When the Jesuits trekked north from Grahamstown to commence their Zambesi Mission, Mrs Orpen, a recent convert to Catholicism, gave them an oil painting which they carried into the interior. It was a crucifixion scene where the crucified Christ is shown surrounded by "Zulu Chiefs kneeling and wrapt in reverential astonishment". (1) At the Jesuits' Gubulawayo station, the chapel, as is customary, was hung with paintings depicting the fourteen stations of the cross. An early visitor to the chapel was an Ndebele aristocrat identified only by the royal name Khumalo. The narrative which the stations trace was explained to him but when he reached the twelfth station, where Christ dies on the cross, "a smile of incredulity touched his lips". He said to Fr Croonenberghs: "That is not possible. No, Jesus Christ cannot be the Son of God." And Croonenberghs notes that "the Cross of Jesus will always be a scandal and a madness in the eyes of human wisdom". (2) King Lobengula commanded to be shown around the chapel and he too was struck by the station depicting Christ's death. After contemplating it for some minutes, "he began to protest against the infamous barbarity of White people who had so cruelly tortured the Saviour" but was "deeply moved" when he was told that this was the intention of God. (3)

These anecdotes surrounding the first Western paintings publicly exhibited in Zimbabwe are instructive of the competing interpretations post-colonialism's various constituencies can make of the same sign. Mrs Orpen's painting was completed within the months following the great Zulu victory at Isandhlwana and cannot be read simply as another expression of the Christian hope that all humanity will bow to Christ. In the context of 1879, her kneeling Zulus have to be seen in directly colonial terms: Europe has at its disposal the ideological apparatus to awe and astonish people whom British arms cannot vanquish. In Matabeleland, the

crucifixion is interpreted through a value system which Europe likes to think is not its own. A God who allows his son to get crucified is unsatisfactory to an aristocrat of a society largely shaped around military hierarchies. The old noble is certainly not going to kneel beneath the gibbet of an obvious failure. Since there are presumably no Zulus in the stations' crucifixion, the king cannot learn the lesson which Mrs Orpen's painting is designed to inculcate. Instead of recognizing European power, he is shocked at European barbarity, and it is only after Croonenberghs has offered a theology of the cross that the king acquires an understanding which is correct in Croonenberghs' terms. Lobengula's long silence implies that he recognises the symbolic economy of the Atonement and that only from death are birth and resurrection possible, that suffering is creative.

Different responses to the same image speak to the instability of the image. Culture and

temperament allow the viewer to refuse the intention of the artist or the belief system out of which art grows.

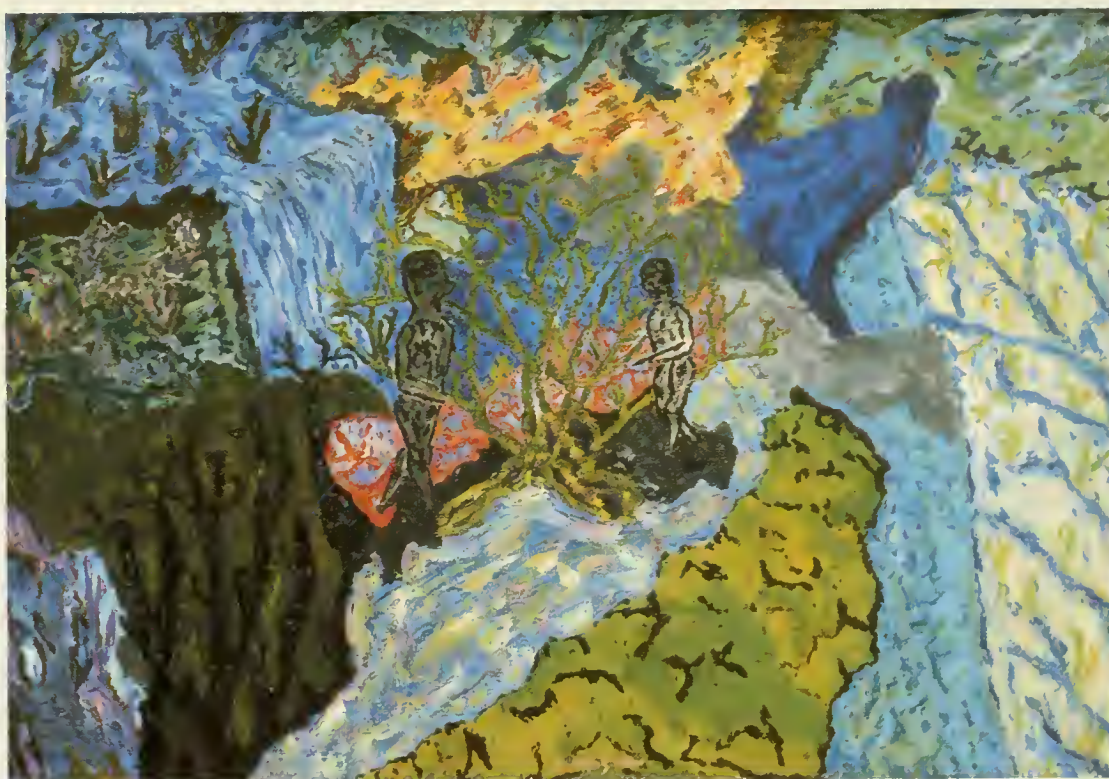
In this case we can be more precise in identifying the source of that instability. The cross is mediated through a number of interpreters: Mrs Orpen, appalled at the Zulu victory in Natal; Fr Croonenberghs, providing an orthodox Pauline reading of what the cross means; the Ndebele king and aristocrat, testing the adequacy of the cross against Ndebele ideologies and prejudices. Croonenberghs' hopes as a missionary serve to filter meanings and to control our responses.

Finally there is my intervention. I have brought together scattered references to two different paintings and out of them have made a single narrative. My late 20th century scepticism at the stability and permanence of beliefs has biased the narrative which I have constructed out of

Senserina Phillimon, *The Birth of Jesus*, (undated c. 1965?), 20 x 29cm, pencil and crayon on paper



Thomas Mukarobgwa, *Adam and Eve*, 1964, 70 x 100cm, oil on canvas (NGZ: PC-9400-0189)



Steffen Götting

Jesuit missionaries, two crucifixion paintings, and the Ndebele rulers.

In the first part of this article I spoke of the double consciousness of Europe's settlers as long as they regard the metropolitan centre as the source of cultural certainty. (4) For the colonised, however, the problem of centre is more acute. Some racial memory, however inexact, connects whites with metropolitan cultures. For the colonised, metropolitan culture has almost invariably been imposed on them against their wishes. Its presence in their lives cannot be seen in the traces of a previous existence. Colonialism nevertheless demanded that the colonised accommodate metropolitan practices and justified the demand because of the colonisers' belief that the metropole's knowledge is superior and its cultural practices morally normative.

An obvious site for this claim is religion: the religion of the metropole is offered as rational and truthful while the colonised's religion is designated as superstition and idolatry. Even when the colonised adopts the new faith, he or she is a neophyte, who must undergo a long period of testing before being allowed to speak with authority on behalf of the new spiritual order. During Africa's de-colonising decades, Christianity's role in colonisation was a frequent target of African nationalist polemic. Walter Rodney, for example, notes that, "[i]n serving colonialism, the church often took up the role of arbiter of what was culturally correct." (5) Nineteenth-century missionaries conflated Christian morality with the social practices of middle-class Europe and America, and a measure of Christian conviction was the familiarity

converts demonstrated with alien social customs.

Post-colonialism has been particularly concerned to show the way in which this imposition of the coloniser's customs was resisted. The Khumalo aristocrat weighed the cross against his cultural preconceptions and found it wanting. But this was not so much resistance as the cultural reflex of a privileged conservative. The king found in the painting a confirmation of European cruelty. The most effective form of resistance has been when the colonised appropriates the idioms of the new order, whether they be guns or ideas, and turns them back against the metropole. In Anglophone Africa, religion has been the most accessible idea within imperialism, if only because in the 19th century the missionary lobby in London was so strong that few politicians wished to tangle with it. Not surprisingly then, in Zimbabwe the first black writers and painters of the modern age were Christians. They were also usually nationalist politicians. Mrs Orpen was wrong in anticipating that a submission to Christ would be a submission to Britain. Zimbabwe's Christian painters may kneel before the cross but they do not kneel in order to admire white culture. They have both appropriated Christianity and allowed it to become another facet of the multiple facets of Zimbabwean culture. (6)

There are many ways in which the semiotics of colonial religion can be appropriated. The Black Christ is the most obvious of these. In painting Christ as African, Africa's artists do what European artists have done for a thousand years: Europe proclaims its shared humanity with Christ by making Him

racially and culturally European. Africa has confidently done the same.

A local cultural appropriation of Christianity can be seen in a drawing from the Serima school by Senserina Phillimon. *The Birth of Jesus* is set among the rocks and villages of the Mashonaland landscape although their literal reproduction is less important than the pattern of repeated curves which the rocks are made to describe, and which recurs in the tree shapes. The landscape is reduced to semi-circles and they and the triangles of the pitched thatched roofs of the homestead recall the patterns on Shona baskets, pots and walls. The human figures are the familiar agents of the nativity story but the artist has domesticated them within the decorative patterns of Shona material culture.

Thomas Mukarobgwa's *Adam and Eve* has already been reproduced in *Gallery* but it lends itself to a more detailed analysis than space allowed on the previous occasion. (7) It is a landscape with figures which the title identifies as the Eden of Genesis. The painting is shaped around strong diagonals which stabilise the two figures at its centre. Between the figures, the green tangled branches of a tree refer to the Tree of Knowledge. The taller figure — the Adam of the title, the right-hand figure has a woman's body — emerges from the left of the painting, from a patch of sombre colour, criss-crossed with dead branches which contrast with the living colour of the central tree. The most striking feature of the painting is on its right. The green section at the base is moulded to suggest both top and side of a steep hill and the sense of its height is accentuated by the blue section which

borders it to the right. Beyond the blue, and on the edge, is a rectangle of light colour veined with blue. It seems a landscape, seen from above as one sees Nyanga's lowlands from the top of its escarpments, crossed with rivers whose sources lie beneath the flanks of the hillside.

However else one reads this painting, its title insists that it is addressing the origin myth of Genesis but it is also appropriating it, making it Zimbabwean by locating the human agents of Eden within a Zimbabwean landscape. Perhaps more is being attempted than that. Is there not a re-writing of the Genesis story itself? In a story concerned with the Fall, I cannot read the great height on the right without finding the Fall metaphorically present in hillside and valley. But if the section at the right of the painting, which is suffused with light, lies outside Eden, to reach it seems gain rather than loss. The single river which forms the waterfall of the top left hand corner has been replaced with many streams. Light, water and multiple possibilities seem to lie in that far-off valley.

Christianity is a powerful centre of contemporary Africa's spiritual life but Africa's cultural productions will frequently be informed by a spirituality which owes nothing to Christianity. Landscape as a site for spiritual presences can be seen in Chris Chipfuya's *Mountain Landscape*. Like Mukarobgwa's landscape, its different sections provide a sense of heights and valleys. A mountain in the centre of the top quarter of the painting can, as one shifts one's gaze, become a field viewed from above. Each discrete area is outlined with a thick brush stroke so that one sees differences before noting how each section fits together. Separation and inter-connectedness are simultaneously proclaimed. At first glance, the red, brown, blue and green at the centre bottom of the painting seem merely to repeat the suggestion of ploughed field in the top right-hand corner. But the zig-zag lines crossing the bottom section affirm that on this part of the landscape humanity has put its mark. Tower and wall begin to insist on their presence. They not only provide the outline for this section but recall Great Zimbabwe. The man-made city has a central place within the landscape and it makes its own contribution to the landscape's spirituality.

Chipfuya's painting is more than landscape then. It is in part a theological statement about the function of land within a Shona consciousness which here at least is not touched by Christianity. Shona spirituality affirms the wholeness of all creation: everything belongs and everything has its place. Included in that everything are the patterned walls and tower. This is more than an amorphous celebration of nature's sacredness. The creativity of human society



Dani Deudney



Dani Deudney

(top) Chris Chipfuya, *Mountain Landscape*, 1996, 51 x 66cm, watercolour and textile ink on paper
(above) Chris Chipfuya, *Zimbabwe Pre and Post Independence*, 1996, 39 x 60cm, watercolour and textile ink on paper

Hillary Kashiri, *Kumasowe*, 1996, 40 x 52cm, acrylic on paper



Alan Allen

expressed in the greatest of Zimbabwe's pre-colonial monuments has a place within a spiritual order that is both natural and social.

Chipfuya's *Zimbabwe Pre and Post Independence* addresses another manifestation of the artificial. A conventional enough landscape provides the top frame of the painting: trees, distant and near hills, painted with browns and dull reds which recall Zimbabwe's recent droughts. Beneath it, however, straight diagonal lines, in colours which derive little from nature, dominate the picture. On one level it is another mountain landscape, with the straight lines suggesting fields viewed from above. But the lines, in the modernity of their colours, insist on their presence both as artifact and as a new source of order. Their colours refer to flags and, within the rectangles which they form, the brightest colours of nature are contained. If the linked parts in the previous landscape address the harmony between humanity, the soil and the spirit world, in this painting it is the shaping power of the new nation which is triumphantly foregrounded. Order and exuberance have replaced that dry frieze of rocks and trees.

Colonised Zimbabwe and its liberation are often, in our literature, referred to in terms of drought and rain. This painting implies something more ambivalent than those simple oppositions can contain. The fact that the lines are so Western in their coloring complicates any reading which suggests that at Independence Zimbabwe recovered its authentic being. Instead the lines signify an independent Zimbabwe inscribed both with its pre-colonial and its colonial histories. In politics as in Christianity, Zimbabwe has appropriated something foreign and used it to construct its contemporary self.

Christianity has not remained the property of the mainstream churches which have their local foundations in 19th century missionary work. When I saw Hillary Kashiri's *Kumasowe* at a recent Delta exhibition, I was struck by both the painting and the title. The painting shows a circle of the granite boulders which are so prominent a feature of our landscape but here they are not offered with the solidity of rock on earth. Instead they protrude from water on which they seem to float. The date shows that this was painted after one of the best rainy seasons in years and the hard dry colours which create the rocks refuse to dominate. Instead it is a painting which celebrates wetness: sky and water blot out the horizon so that there is a constant interchange between them. Any danger that the wet will oppress is avoided by the light in the top left-hand corner which balances the dark blue in the opposite lower corner and, between these oppositions, there is the constant movement of water.

of an abundant rainy season conveys some of its quality. The title, however, offers other clues to enhance our reading. Kumasowe is a favourite meeting place of the Apostolics who, despite their various divisions, testify in their ritual to their Christian base and their refusal to allow Christianity to be an expression of Western domination. The Apostolics meet out-of-doors, a symbolic rejection, in the days of segregation, of a land carved out between black and white. Not only is segregation rejected: Maranke's Apostolic church regarded itself as occupying the spiritual space between a white-dominated church and traditional religion. Wherever the Apostolics are there is the church and where they worship, a simple arrangement of stones on the ground marks the divisions of the New Temple. The rocks in the painting of this Apostolic site delineate a natural temple. As important to the Apostolics as their mobility is their belief that they are the source of a new baptism. In the same way as they reject buildings for worship so the water for their baptism is drawn directly from the rivers of Zimbabwe. In Kashiri's painting, an absence of a distinction between sky and earth, the fact that this water has not been made available by technology, proclaims that this water flows directly from heaven. Here is a place of worship and a means of baptism which God and Zimbabwe make possible.

Colonialism is a fact of history and everyone in Zimbabwe is caught up in its consequences. I have spoken of belief: the belief of missionaries but also the religious beliefs of Zimbabweans which may derive from Christianity or from a faith that land is held on behalf of the ancestors for those who are yet to come. Belief can constitute subjects other than the spiritual. Zimbabwe's freedom and its potential as a nation inform the second of Chipfuya's paintings and a secular conviction is given the vitality of an apocalypse. In the founding of their churches, the Apostolics challenged the right of the settler state and the missionary churches to stand between them and God. Confident of their own merits through Christ, they defied colonial mediation. But have we now, 16 years into our own independence, recovered the authentic identity which colonialism transgressed? The answer must surely be no. In the 90 years of colonialism in Zimbabwe, new material realities were created and out of them grew corresponding states of consciousness which are reproduced in our cultural life. Ours is a culture which is constantly rejecting essentialist identities. Consider Zimbabwean nationalism, the Apostolics, the Liberation War, the claims and counter-claims of what constitutes indigenous, Sam Levy's village (a monument to a cultural nostalgia whose subject has been displaced from England via southern California before

emerging, triumphantly tacky, in the middle of Africa), Harare's Carlton Club, formerly The Copacabana (names to brood on as one listens to the club's authentic Zimbabwean music), and the lovely colonial buildings which house Gallery Delta and the Bulawayo Art Gallery.

In a post-colonial age, all cultures are hybrid and necessarily so because any culture is shaped from the accretions of history and post-colonial history grows from many different roots. Double or indeed multiple consciousness becomes a weakness only when its diffusions are regarded as a source of shame: when the white Zimbabwean sees it as interfering with an authentic European identity say. But it is not only the white African who is affronting history when he or she searches for an authenticity which cannot exist. As the pictures I have discussed in this article suggest, even when black Zimbabweans are celebrating a nationhood won through war, they use, and quite correctly use, among other idioms and perspectives, the idioms and perspectives of the coloniser to make their claims and assertions. In the act of appropriation, however, these cease to be the intellectual property of the coloniser. Not only is multiple consciousness not a weakness, it is the only way in which black or white can apprehend the past which has created our complex and constantly changing identities.

Notes

1. Fr Law to Fr Weld, 21 April 1879, in *Gubulawayo and Beyond: Letters and Journals of the Early Jesuit Missionaries to Zambesia (1879-1887)* ed. Michael Gelfand, London: Geoffrey Chapman, 1968, p 67.
2. Letter from Fr Croonenberghs, 16 October 1880, in *Journey to Gubulawayo: Letters of Frs H. Depelchin and C. Croonenberghs, S.J. 1879, 1880, 1881* trans. Moira Lloyd, ed. R.S. Roberts, Bulawayo: Books of Rhodesia, 1979, p 315.
3. Letter from Fr Croonenberghs, 27 November 1880, *ibid.*, p 335.
4. *Gallery* no 7 (March 1996), p 3.
5. Walter Rodney, *How Europe Underdeveloped Africa*, 1972: rpt. Harare: Zimbabwe Publishing House, n.d.[1983], p 278.
6. Accounts of two Christian art centres can be found in A B. Plangger and M. Diethelm eds, *Serimu: Towards an African Expression of Christian Belief*, Gweru: Mambo Press, 1977; and David A C. Walker, *Paterson of Cyrene: A Biography*, Gweru: Mambo Press, 1985. For Christianity and writers see Flora Veit-Wild, *Teachers, Preachers, Non-Believers: A Social History of Zimbabwean Literature*, London: Hans Zell, 1992 and Harare: Baobab, 1993, pp 17-19, 45-52. For the way in which guerrillas during the war, depending on their backgrounds, used Christianity or traditional religion as inspiration see T.O. Ranger, "Holy men and rural communities in Zimbabwe, 1970-1980" in W.J. Shiels ed. *The Church and War*, Vol 20, Oxford: Blackwell, 1983.
7. *Gallery* no 5 (September 1995), p 16.

Editor's note: In part one, "Empire's offspring" in *Gallery* no 7, reference was incorrectly made to Fanon. The writer referred to was, in fact, Foucault.

Grazyna Zaucha, art historian and curator of the Choma Museum, investigates the growth of graphic art in Zambia



Zambia: Identities in print

Zambian Graphics: A Retrospective Exhibition of Printmaking in Zambia opened at the Choma Museum, Zambia, on 9 March 1996, featuring 60 works of nine artists from various private collections. While emphasising individual achievements, the exhibition is at the same time, a testimony to the successful introduction of this art form in Zambia. A general tendency towards figurative representation is apparent but a more recent trend towards abstraction and experimental work is also evident. The exhibition shows clearly that the artists are not so much concerned with breaking new ground as with using the Western techniques in order to explore their own identities.

On display are the works of exponents such as Cynthia Zukas, practising graphic artist since 1964, and Henry Tayali, the first formally trained black Zambian artist. These are boldly counterpointed by the mainly black and white prints of the Lusaka Artists Group, Bert Witkamp, David Chibwe, Fackson Kulya and Patrick Mweemba. The new directions are reflected in the works of Andrew Makromalis, Lutanda Mwamba and Patrick Mumba.

There are various interpretations as to when, how and why this particular art form became embedded in Zambia. Two explanations of the beginnings of the Zambian graphics are particularly popular.



(top) Bert Witkamp, *Beauty is a Cure for Madness*, 1980, 15 x 20cm, linocut

(above) Henry Tayali, *Madam and the Rains*, 1982, 40 x 23cm, woodcut

One opinion has it that printmaking became a major art form in Zambia due to difficulties in obtaining art materials. This interpretation alludes to the economic problems which Zambia started to face from the mid 70s onwards. It cannot be denied that the production and dissemination of certain art forms might be constrained by the economy. However a closer look at printmaking reveals that techniques such as etching, wood cutting, lino cutting and screen printing involve specialised materials which may be expensive and not easily obtained. Leaving aside the complicated requirements of etching and the relative simplicity of screen printing, even wood and lino cutting require base materials, knives, printing inks, papers, rollers and a relief press. Therefore an argument based solely on economics does not offer a sufficient explanation.

The second opinion as to the emergence and popularisation of graphic art in Zambia accords overriding importance to the Art Centre Foundation, together with the influence of the two artists most closely associated with it, Cynthia Zukas and Henry Tayali. The Art Centre Foundation (ACF) was established as a national body responsible for the promotion of visual art in Zambia. To this end, the Foundation maintained the national collection of art and organised annual exhibitions. Its direct contribution to the development of printmaking consisted of providing a

working space for artists at the Evelyn Hone College in Lusaka.

The role of Cynthia Zukas and Henry Tayali as protagonists of printmaking in Zambia was significant. Cynthia Zukas, educated at the universities of Cape Town and London, practised linocutting, monoprinting and fabric printing. Etching became her main medium of expression in the early 70s and to date she remains the only Zambian artist practising it on a professional basis. Her works, such as *Leaves* and *Walking Home*, show empathy with nature and feature interpretations of the life of Zambian women. Cynthia Zukas made it possible for other artists to produce prints by importing an etching press and making it available to them.

Henry Tayali studied art at universities in Uganda and Germany. On his return home he was appointed University Artist at the University of Zambia and until his death in 1986, he played a leading role in the promotion of art in Zambia. Primarily a painter, Tayali made woodcuts and occasionally screenprints from the early 70s. His *Mother* and *The Madam and the Rains* are reminiscent of the German Expressionists in their deliberate use of dynamic lines. To aspiring artists, Henry Tayali provided the first role model of a successful black Zambian artist practising printmaking.

To date, the importance of the Lusaka Artists Group (LAG) in the development and popularisation of graphic art in Zambia has hardly been acknowledged. In spite of its short existence between 1976 and 1980, the LAG played a prominent role in the history of printmaking. In this respect the presence and influence of Bert Witkamp and his relationship with the LAG must be recognised. Bert Witkamp came to Zambia in 1975. He was a Dutch artist and art teacher with a thorough working knowledge of printmaking and good organisational



Grazyna Zaucho

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Grazyna Zaucho

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Grazyna Zaucho

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Grazyna Zaucho

skills. Inspired by the philosophies of the 60s and outspoken in his anti-establishment approach, he became instrumental in organising aspiring Zambian artists. Together with David Chibwe, Fackson Kulya, Patrick Mweemba and others, he formed the Lusaka Artists Group.

Witkamp believed that art was a social phenomenon and that communication was its main function. Therefore it should be made accessible to as many people as possible. Printmaking, with its essential feature of multiplication, was less exclusive than painting or sculpture and could be made affordable to one and all. The linocut was chosen as the most 'democratic' of all techniques. Similar to woodcut, it was simpler in handling and had the added appeal of being more modern. The linocut was perfectly suited to bold and simplified rather than naturalistic effects which was an advantage to artists with no formal training. If the materials were not available, they could be improvised, particularly with regard to inks.

A unifying factor amongst the members of the LAG was the common concern to live from the sale of their art. They did not indulge in 'art for art's sake'; they had to make their living out of it. The figurative mode of expression they chose to communicate with, found a market and became popular, allowing the artists, over time, to develop more personal styles.

The works of Bert Witkamp, David Chibwe, Fackson Kulya and Patrick Mweemba on the retrospective exhibition, form a recognisable group in their use of mainly black and white linocut. Bert Witkamp's prints show a marked metamorphosis over the years, from elaborate, decorative representations such as *Beauty is a Cure for Madness* towards simplified but meaningful images as in *The Shape of the House*. For others the surrounding life is their main source of inspiration. David Chibwe is clearly

(1) Bert Witkamp, *The Shape of the House*, 1986, 25 x 23cm, linocut

(2) Patrick Mweemba, *Three Blind Men crossing the River*, 1979, 15 x 19cm, linocut

(3) Lutanda Mwamba, *Namfumu II*, 1990, 33 x 20.5cm, screenprint

(4) Patrick Mweemba, *Mockery*, 1980, 23 x 17.5cm, linocut

attracted to an objective and detached documentary style, his prints showing a fascination for market and social scenes as in *A Chat in the Park* and *Craftsmen at Work*.

Fackson Kulya and Patrick Mweemba give priority to subjective, intuitive, sometimes naïve, but always very personal reactions to reality as in Kulya's *The Hut of Music*. Disregarding conventional realism, they distort shapes and colours but never beyond recognition. Fackson Kulya also excels in humorous representations executed in a detailed way as exemplified by the print entitled *Rushing out of the Bush with the Nose in the Hand but that Big I Saw It*. Patrick Mweemba, on the contrary, prefers cleanly defined solid forms, and uses line in a characteristic and masterly manner as in *Three Blindmen Crossing the River* and *Mockery*.

During the few years of its existence, the LAG met regularly at the Evelyn Hone College premises in Lusaka, made available to them through the Art Centre Foundation and over the years, the workshop at the Evelyn Hone College came to be known as the property of the Art Centre Foundation. The ideals of the LAG were pasted over.

Cynthia Zukas and Henry Tayali served as a resource for the LAG through intermittent visits and interaction but their social position and formal art education created an invisible barrier that could not easily be crossed. There is very little evidence in the works of Chibwe, Kulya or Mweemba to demonstrate that they were influenced in any way by either Cynthia Zukas or Henry Tayali. Apart from occasional experiments, neither their techniques nor their personal styles were adopted by the members of the LAG.

Printmaking in Zambia did not halt with the break-up of the Lusaka Artists Group. The



Grazyna Zaucha

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Grazyna Zaucha

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Grazyna Zaucha

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members dispersed but continued to create their prints through the 80s. In the early 90s, a new trend in printmaking set in, characterised by the search for new means of expression and communication. Artists such as Andrew Makromalis, Lutanda Mwamba and Patrick Mumba started to experiment with the medium, stretching it beyond its confines and bringing it significantly closer to painting.

Andrew Makromalis, an artist and art teacher, was trained in South Africa and the United Kingdom. Known for his imaginative, free-form ceramics, he turned to monoprints in the early 90s, producing colourful, striking and unconventional results as seen in *Fireball* and *Centurion*.

Lutanda Mwamba and Patrick Mumba received their first art classes at the Evelyn Hone College in Lusaka, later supplemented by training in Britain. Both practise painting and colour screen printing, working however towards different results. Lutanda Mwamba, introduced to printmaking by Patrick Mweemba, has become one of the most prolific graphic artists in Zambia. He has a preference for descriptive and decorative representations used to good effect in *Nanfunu II*. Patrick Mumba, primarily a painter, explores reductionist and nearly abstract imagery in prints such as *The Mask*.

Printmaking in Zambia cannot be seen as simply the result of economic constraints or the influence of an established body aimed at promoting art. It developed consciously as an art form due to the interaction of several factors and is still in its formative stage.

Note: *Zambian Graphics* is a travelling exhibition, on display at the Choma Museum until 6 July 1996. Thereafter it will be on view both within Zambia and across the border in Botswana and in Germany.

(1) Patrick Mumba, *The Mask*, 1994, 49 x 34cm, screenprint

(2) Fackson Kulya, *Rushing out of the Bush with the Nose in the Hand but that Big I saw it*, 1988, 23 x 12.5cm, linocut

(3) Andrew Makromalis, *Fireball*, 1992, 44 x 37cm, monoprint

The endurance of the human spirit is the central theme in work by one of Zimbabwe's prominent sculptors. Barbara Murray writes about

Richard Jack: looking beyond differences

For an exhibition catalogue in 1994, Richard Jack wrote:

*"...Balanced forms: chaotic fields.
Sharing peace and the fruit.
Meshing minds
The artist paints and sculpts."*

Chaotic, meshing and balancing are three words that reveal a deep trend in Richard Jack's work. Born in Zimbabwe, Jack moved to Natal, South Africa, with his parents when he was quite young. His father, an architect and painter, encouraged him to take up art as a career. After studying graphic art at Durban Technikon, Jack worked in advertising for a few years but found the work superficial and meaningless in the conflict-ridden environment of apartheid. In order to express himself and engage more seriously with reality, he decided to work at art. Miro, the Surrealists and Picasso impressed him with their free use of ideas and media and he soon took to sculpture combining a graphic African style with quirky mixed materials. His first works were five large extraordinary road signs using both rural and urban materials such as straw, sticks, poles, drums, and aluminium, duco paint, steel and manufactured bits, decorated with bright colours and geometric elements reflecting the influence of African design.

Political issues were at the forefront of his mind; the conflicts within the society; the varying beliefs and attitudes which he describes as "schizophrenic"; the search for a way, a sign along the road. His work reveals a continuing attempt to balance and mesh the chaos of his environment, the contrasting materials reflecting tensions in society but suggesting the possibility of harmony and strength in combination.

In 1981 on his return to Zimbabwe, Jack exhibited at Gallery Delta where his mixed media objects caused a sensation. Employing a myriad of materials and music, he created lively, composite creatures of modern African/technological descent. Whereas in Europe and elsewhere mixed media sculpture was often seen, at that time in Zimbabwe it was a little known phenomenon. Jack's work was to have a telling influence on local artists who until then had been trapped in the mindset of stone sculpture. The result was the development of controversial, and still often disparaged, mixed media sculpture in Zimbabwe.

Looking back, Jack says:

"Formal training might have made it easier but I have experimented and found my own way. An artist is expressing the environment, the time and the society he lives in. I like the mixture of media, then you are not controlled by your medium. You can put anything together."

Richard Jack,
Arching, 1994,
approx.
100 x 30 x 30cm,
serpentine

Art is a continually changing thing so my work has no consistent style. I don't want to be categorised or restricted. If I get trapped in doing one type I break away and start something new."

Jack sees the artist in Zimbabwe as isolated, "working on his own intuition. What happens in Europe has little influence here, which is not a bad thing. You don't get confused by other people's theories and work." But on the other hand, "outside influence can be good. Shona sculpture did at least establish Zimbabwe as a country with an interest in art. Artists who go out bring back new ideas. Tapfuma's influence is good. He's so outspoken, working with people. Some of the younger sculptors are now breaking away from the traditional. Dominic Benhura and Garrison are doing interesting stuff. Nicholas Mukomberanwa does some really good work. But there is a lot of repetition. I miss John Takawira. His work was so powerful, he was such an individual. The problem is the education here. There is no self-examination, no in-depth study of art, how and why works have been created. Young artists here have to be taught to think for themselves."

Having come to the conclusion that "politics is corrupt everywhere", Jack now takes a humanitarian stance — "other elements of life become more important". His recent works, encompassing sculpture and print media, deal with elemental forms. Detail is reduced to a minimum. His major concern is the figure, capturing in simple strong masses a physical rendering of the human essence.

"The human form is endlessly fascinating. There is no perfect form."

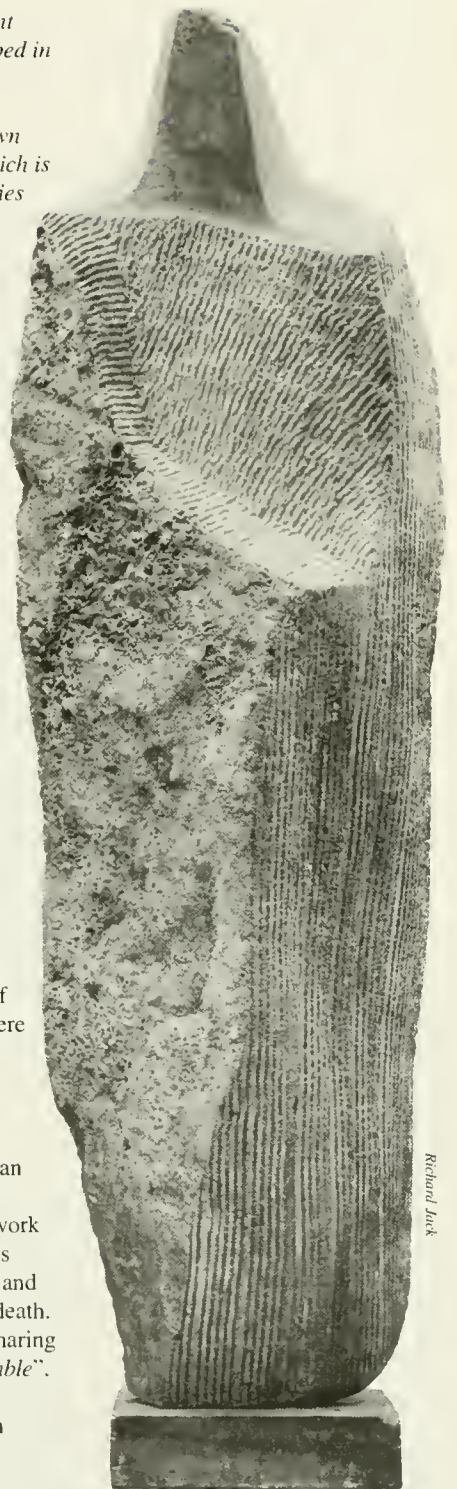
Jack creates areas of subtle modulation, using indications of bone and flesh, introducing the play of light over shapes and surfaces. Contrasts of rough and smooth echo the movement of the forms, working to reveal the artist's intentions. At times there is a lapse into whimsical stylisation of the human form introducing a certain coyness — the desire for harmony subverting the balance.

Meditative and resilient, Jack survives and makes his living as an artist in the context of Zimbabwe, looking beyond the chaotic surface to the deeper levels of human existence. His work covers a wide range of subjects and is in many respects autobiographical. For example, *Listening to the Wind* and *Consolation* relate to his mother's old age and recent death. *Between Two Halves* concerns male domination, the sharing of food, Adam and Eve, and "what happens round a table".

Other works, such as *Back to Back* which was made in response to Mangope's futile attempted coup in South Africa, speak to the political environment. Isolation,

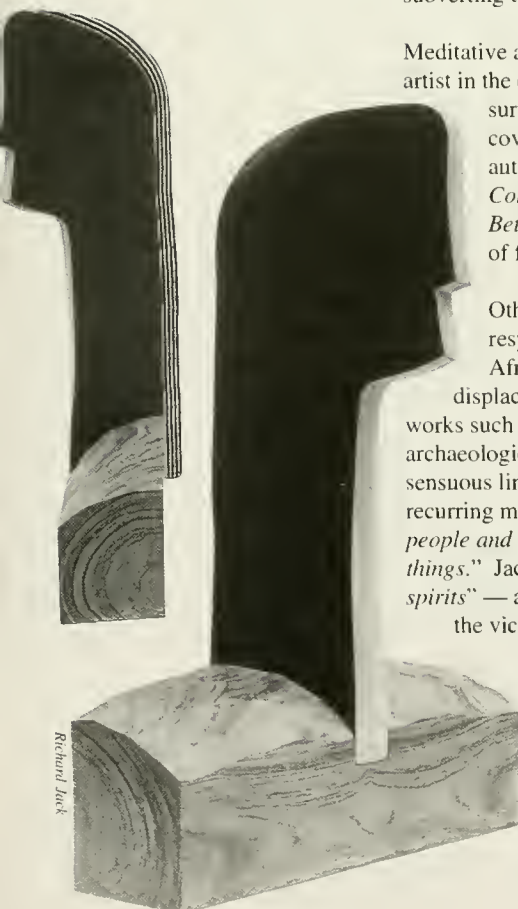
displacement and homelessness are recurring themes, seen in works such as *Alone*, *Alexandria* and *Florence* have a sense of archaeological history, the vase and female form reflecting classical, sensuous line, fragments of the past. *Table and Still Life* is another recurring motif centred on his statement that "fruit and objects, people and conversations, life is changed and revolves around these things." Jack has spoken of the "contemporary cries of primitive spirits" — always there is concern for the human being caught up in the vicissitudes of life yet the works convey a sense of timelessness and inner stillness.

Constantly juxtaposing disparate elements, materials, styles, Jack's work reflects the experience he lives. The qualities of different materials, now largely simplified to combinations of stone, wood and metal, are effectively used to underline his concepts. The soft warmth of wood may be contrasted with the hard coldness of stone, and their organic natures juxtaposed



Richard Jack

(above) Richard Jack, *Florence*, 1992, approx. 60 x 20 x 20cm, serpentine



Richard Jack

(left) Richard Jack, *Man and Woman* (right and left views), 1996, 56 x 34 x 19cm, serpentine and wood

with the stiff formality of steel. His long experience with the materials results in a craftsman's approach, understanding and employing the specificities of each.

Among Jack's recent work is *In the Eye of the Atoll*, an anti-nuclear statement. Two pieces of red mopane wood have been carved to reveal the grain, their smooth surface polished to a warm glow. They form a human chest split apart by the rising force from the atoll. In contrast the dominant central element, forming spine and head but also representing the nuclear cloud, is hacked from rough grey serpentine and attached with steel. The resultant sculpture has a commanding presence. Jack employs the opposed techniques of sculpture and print to offer disparate views of his subject. The simple but imposing forms of *In the Eye of the Atoll* are re-interpreted in a print — a mass of sculpture becomes a series of lines, adding an echo. This reduction to flat surface and scratchiness of line serve to enhance the solidity and anthropomorphism of the sculpture.

The need to have his work shown elsewhere is strong:

"I want a reaction. I'm trying to create a feeling, to get through to people everywhere."

Part of Jack's frustration is his exclusion from foreign mounted exhibitions of Zimbabwean or African art because he is white:

"People think that 'African' work must be from blacks."

He is an African and his work inevitably reflects African reality but he thinks of his art as being international — *"my work is about people and society"* — humanity regardless of country or race. Richard Jack's approach is an optimistic one, based on a deeply held belief in the potential for good in the human spirit, in the possibility of bringing together different philosophies, customs, attitudes, in meshing and balancing seemingly chaotic elements to create harmonious combinations.



Richard Jack

Richard Jack, *In the Eye of the Atoll*, 1996, 82 x 55 x 23cm, steel, serpentine and wood

One of art's functions is to blow open windows in the mind. Margaret Garlake sends news of the continuing discovery of new possibilities.

Letter from London

**Anya Gallaccio,
Preserve 'Red Beauty', 1996.
(Photo courtesy the artist
& The Henry Moore Institute)**



A few days ago I received an envelope postmarked Las Vegas, a city where I know no-one. It contained a balloon, bearing the words "If I fish a fish / You cook it / Whose fish is it?" I take this to be an art-work, albeit a modest one (as well as a statement of anxiety about gender relations). A compensation for mailing-list junk is that occasionally something serendipitous happens, like a balloon.

The point is that in London people receive a great deal of information about exhibitions, most of which it is impossible to visit, while art flourishes in many other centres and, indeed, in places which are not centres at all. 'London', then, is not so much a place of commercial opportunity and open doors (though it may be that as well) as a wider locus for invention, the redrawing of boundaries and a constant reinvestigation of art's roles and possibilities. And this creativity may not take place in the city at all: it may simply act on the city.

The Bowes Museum, at Barnard's Castle in far-away Co. Durham was the setting for an imaginative show which foregrounded the always sensitive issues of curatorial licence and artistic autonomy. The Bowes is not like other museums. The building is a 17th century French chateau built in the 1870s in northern England to house the private collection of John and Josephine Bowes. Between 1861 and 1875 they bought over 15,000 items which range from a crust of bread said to date from the Paris Commune

to some rather nice Meissen porcelain, plus furniture, paintings (often dubious) and entire 'period' rooms. The Bowes' frenetic acquisition may have had to do with a desire for social legitimisation, since he was an illegitimate member of an aristocratic family grown exceedingly rich on coal, while she was a French actress. Relatively little has been added to the collections since their deaths, so the Museum remains largely a time-capsule, a monument to prevalent but uncertain taste and a singular lack of discrimination.

Into it, two curators, Penelope Curtis and Veit Gerner inserted contemporary works by a group of disparate British and German artists. In almost every case, the pieces were selected extremely carefully from existing work, for the interactions that they might stimulate with specific locations in the vast expanse of the Bowes. From the random blobs of gold-painted plaster dotted around the walls and floor of a rococo room, to the little wax models called *English Clergy* posed in a late Gothic interior, the pieces worked as commentaries, poignant, witty or ironic, on the existing collection. It's fairly predictable that Damien Hirst's pickled sheep should nudge up to a two-headed calf; less so that both should occupy a room devoted to local industries; this particular sheep has not been much discussed as representative of the late Victorian rural economy. Upstairs, in a room containing *inter alia* a sedan chair and some indelicate French 18th century paintings, were Catherine Yass' back-lit colour photographs

of the curators, contemporary versions of John and Josephine, responsible for 're-writing' the 'text' of the collection. As so often, the pieces that worked best were the most discreet. Pressed between two sheets of glass forming a false interior window, Anya Gallaccio (she who a few months ago spectacularly installed a ton of ice in a disused pumping station and waited for it to melt) arranged brilliant red flowers, to decay during the course of the exhibition; in a space entirely filled with Josephine's own mediocre paintings, Gavin Turk placed a paint roller and tray, faced by its own cast in bronze.

Exhibitions which are interventions into locations with strong, existing identities are not unusual. It is, however, extremely rare to find curatorial authority exercised with such acutely intelligent imagination and insight. Because of this, the artists agreed to allow their works to be sited in situations which they had not envisaged, to convey messages not of their makers' devising.

An organisation called Space Explorations took a different approach, on a smaller scale, when they organised an exhibition in a London tower block awaiting demolition. Derelict factories, warehouses and office blocks are regularly snapped up for short-term use by artists as an alternative to scarce and inaccessible commercial gallery spaces. 'High-Rise' used six floors and the basement of a block next to the new British Library: one artist to a floor, working to a clear directive, each one to produce one piece



Carl Andre, *Six Metal Fugue (for Mendeleev)*, 1995, 1 x 1080 x 1080cm, aluminium, steel, copper, zinc, tin, lead

intimately linked to the space. The roof, with spectacular views of the leafy, rainwashed city and Library, held a line of logstacks and a tape of bird calls, wonderfully appropriate to its windswept situation. One floor down, the stripped-out interior space of the concrete skeleton was closed off by a transparent yellow screen which transformed it utterly, with minimal means. And so on. This was another kind of curatorial intelligence at work, which elicited punchy, impermanent pieces which will survive only in a photographic record.

London is top-heavy with galleries but, though it is still difficult to find a space to show in, it is even harder to make it into the pages of the art magazines in the form of a review. Selling is another matter and no easier, but not invariably related to reviews. As John and Josephine demonstrated, items of uncertain taste may be good commercial propositions. Very few of the thousands who exhibit in some manner every year will earn their livings from art; only a miniscule number will become household names, like Hirst. Many artists and galleries are well-respected in the trade but remain totally unknown to a wider public.

In an effort to compel attention, private-view cards are reaching heights of invention not seen since the 1960s and emerging as a new (multiple) art-form. One of the London art colleges has printed its degree show invitations on cotton handkerchiefs, with one corner tied, naturally, into a large knot. "Admission by handkerchief." A bookshop-gallery called *workfortheeyetodo*, in Spitalfields, an area best known for Indian restaurants, has sent out postcards bearing the text "No free reading" and captioned "A sign in the newsagent at Dublin Bus Station, 1996". This is known as a 'teaser': the appeal to curiosity is too strong to be resisted.

A young artist called Darren Lago gave his recent show the title 'How long is a piece of string / $\frac{1}{2}$ as long as the Parthenon'. The invitation carried a plan of the Parthenon and a poem by Belloc: "*Henry King / (who chewed bits of String / and was cut off early in Dreadful Agonies)*". The show itself, held in a former factory/workshop, consisted of a piece of string which stretched the length of an otherwise empty space. (We can take it on faith that it was half as long etc ...) It takes a certain chutzpah to do this; unlike the Wretched Child of Belloc's poem, Lago may well survive — artistically speaking.

Much less witty was a bizarre little event in a gloomy basement gallery where the rotting left-overs of a dinner served to a clutch of artists, dealers, editors and so on, remained as the focus of an 'exhibition'. (Given the near-arctic state of the early summer, there was no hygiene problem.) I understand that

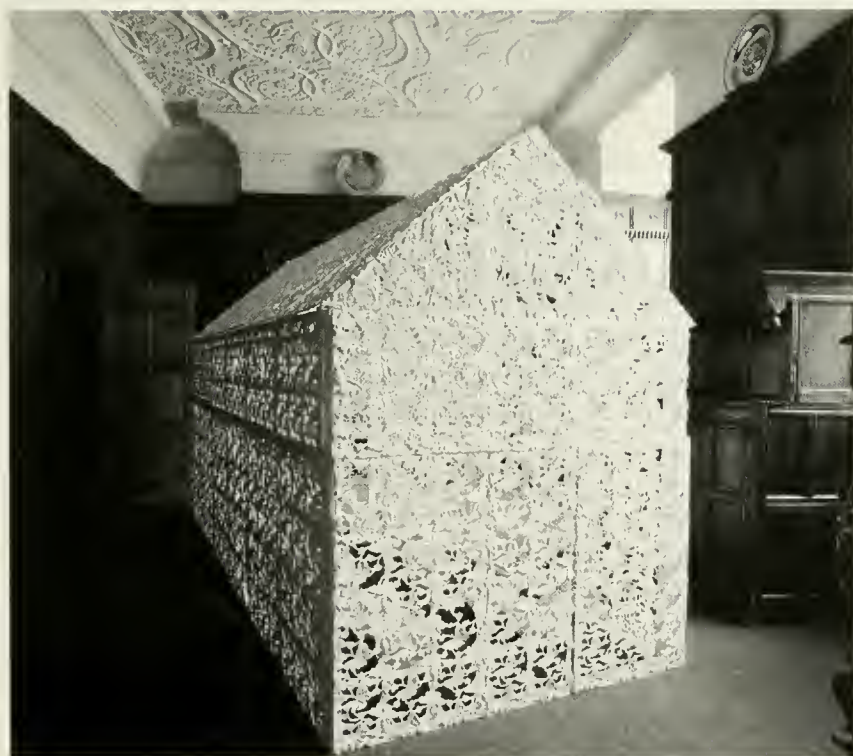


the menu involved pigeon and rose petals and that conversation was sticky. The card, headed “Dinner”, showed the seating plan, and the point of the event seems to have been a somewhat distasteful reassertion of the authority of the art world institutions — galleries, magazines and personalities.

On the other hand, artists are wonderfully inventive in circumventing institutional systems and the barriers raised by too little money and too much competition. For those who work with text — and few visual traditions have a firmer historical pedigree — the Internet is an open door. Maggie Ellenby, who has hitherto displayed art-related aphorisms in a rented window in Rosebery Avenue, near Sadler’s Wells Theatre, has taken possession of a new web site at <http://www.hyena.co.uk/windows93-95>. It takes a lot of persistence, ingenuity and patience, let alone talent, to get a show in ‘London’: serious young artists write, teach, organise exhibitions for other people, as activities interchangeable with making art.

However, there remain ‘great names’. Cézanne, alas, is gone; in Oxford we had a much reduced version of Carl Andre’s recent retrospective from Germany. Unfortunately his work, which is destined, if anything is, for a white cube, and a very large one at that, sat uneasily in the Museum of Modern Art, which has rough walls, a highly grained parquet floor and some very low ceilings. Nothing, though, could do much to diminish the impact of the huge floor piece, *Six Metal Fugue (for Mendeleev)* 1995. Grounded in the Periodic Table, it consists of 30cm squares of copper, steel, tin, aluminium, zinc and lead, arranged in a chequer pattern to display every possible combination of the metals. Rigorously formulated, conceptually elegant and — as a by-product — visually beguiling, *Six Metal Fugue* is worth a long journey, let alone a detour.

There can be no doubt that, however ill-served by the fabric of Oxford’s MoMA, Andre belongs to the centre; to see only a fraction of his work is to realise that he has been of immense importance during the last 20 years in extending notions both of the physical nature of sculpture and its intellectual affinities. MoMA is not, of course, a commercial gallery; a handful of these in London’s West End (Anthony d’Offay, Waddington’s, Annely Juda) share its international stature and its star artists. For most of the rest, it’s a matter of stretching the string as far as it will reach and being realistic about the fact that art’s a hand-to-mouth process — rather more literally so than we may previously have supposed.



(top) Reno Patarica, *Vasen*, 1994 (Photo courtesy the artist)

(above) Daphne Wright, *Still Life - The Greenhouse*, 1995 (Photo courtesy the artist)

Reviews of recent work



Tomy Ndebele, *Mqamulazwe Design*



Vervan Edwards, *Ochre Medley*

Isu Lobuciko and Botswana Thoughts, National Gallery in Bulawayo, May/June 1996

Point of intersection: Vervan Edwards was born in Hong Kong, Tomy Ndebele in Tsholotsho and Voti Thebe in Bulawayo. The three work within the visual arts as workshop facilitator, teacher and administrator respectively. They are all practising 'mid-career' artists, Edwards based in Gaborone, Thebe and Ndebele in Bulawayo.

By chance, they find themselves exhibiting concurrently at the National Gallery in Bulawayo. Thebe and Ndebele are showing jointly in the upstairs Marshall Baron Gallery and Edwards downstairs in the Anglo-American Gallery. This is not the first occasion that the three have met. Edwards is the founding chairperson of Botswana's Thapong Workshop, attended by Tomy Ndebele in 1994. Edwards was at Zimbabwe's Pachipamwe Workshop at Cyrene in 1989, while Thebe has been to Pachipamwe on four occasions and Ndebele on one. It is through the workshop network that many artists in the region have got to know each other and have formed important links.

formats. The gallery glows with her current exhibition, washes and stains in vibrant yellows, reds and blues creating an environment, an aura all of its own. The big canvases permit Edwards to assimilate the imagery and sensibilities of the vast Botswana panorama as well as seeking meaning beyond the confines of the physical and visible. She notes in her artist's statement that:

"Concerns in abstraction tend to be metaphysical; the nature of reality, the relationship of person to world, person to person, the nature of person. This creates a mood that relates in part to the original source-experience on which the paintings are based and to my state of mind/being during the process of painting. The process of painting takes over from the original impetus, with the formal concerns necessitating relations of colour and form ... As artists we try to bridge the gap between the visible and the invisible ... We live a brief candlelight existence amongst mysteries we struggle to comprehend; we become. Stand aside and let the paint speak; marry intellect and intuition."

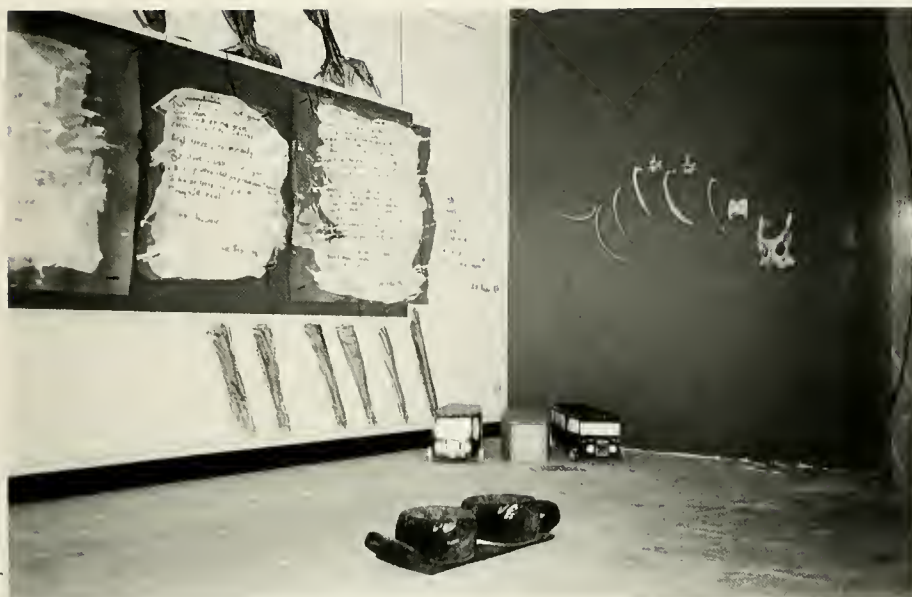
The importance of such articulations within the catalogue notes cannot be understated as they help us to read the work and to gain insights as to the artist's intention.

Edwards' paintings are generous in terms of their dimensions, colour and feel. The viewer is left with the impression that this is an artist who is not only in possession of a unique vision but who has also discovered the appropriate medium and technique with which to express it. Botswana Thoughts is a cohesive body of work which uncompromisingly focuses its energy on the philosophical and formal issues which motivate the artist. The textured *Experience of Oz*, the subtle *Ochre Medley*, the bold *A-Maze* and the innovative *World View* and *Namib Vista* are all gems.

The talking point of the Voti Thebe/Tomy Ndebele show is undoubtedly Thebe's installation *Death is Life, Life is Death*. The piece is situated in an enclosed space. It reflects upon the fact that death is the final and inescapable act of life itself. Mankind's vanity and the class differences which linger even as we troop off to meet our maker are symbolised by three small coffins in the form of a Mercedes Benz, a Volkswagen and a plain cardboard box. The coffins are accompanied by an arrangement of bones placed next to a scribbled poem by Qaphelisasa Nhlanzi ("What are bones for? To keep your flesh erect, otherwise you'll be a lump"), a blanket, a double wooden bowl containing macimbi and maize meal, drums, broken pots, murals and more poems by

a n d forthcoming events and exhibitions

A not-to-be-missed retrospective exhibition of work by **Ilo the Pirate (Battigelli)**, master of black and white, photographer extraordinary, opens at Gallery Delta in July encompassing photographs from 60 years living and working in Europe, Saudi Arabia, America and Africa.



Voti Thebe, *Death is Life, Life is Death*

Thebe himself. The floor is covered in plain canvas.

The enclosed space is provocative and aesthetically bold, but the viewers are left to make up their own minds as to the intent and purpose. This is fair enough, but some observers felt that the piece presented the germ of an idea without being sufficiently developed.

The promise of the installation, however, serves to reveal shortcomings in the rest of the Isu Lobuciko exhibition. Whereas the installation is adventurous and challenging, the opposite applies to the legion of 25 x 40 cm framed paintings arranged in monotonously neat rows. Where the installation alludes to art as an intellectual process, the rest of the show is let down by being predictable and staid. The small size of the work mitigates against its potential to explore the concepts being expressed or to allow the materials being used to assert themselves in formal terms. It is puzzling that the artists have chosen to scale down so much when both have worked much larger in the past.

Where Botswana Thoughts is unified in vision and technique, Isu Lobuciko lacks coherence in that the styles of each artist switch, change and jump around to the

extent that it is often difficult to discern a common drift in the work. Within the 57 paintings on view up to ten distinct styles are detectable (varying from the Mzilikazi school style to pointillism and non-figuration), diluting focus and giving the impression of a large group show rather than a two-person exhibition.

Thebe's new series of white paintings are his best work (*Amazolo Ezolo, The Bird and The Flying Ants*) and Ndebele's ability as a draughtsman asserts itself in *You Are All Welcome* and *Qaphela*. Ndebele's work with the most potential, however, is his oil on canvas series comprising *Mqamulazwe Design, Togetherness* and *Images of Life and Death* (that theme again!), but all scream out for more space.

The convergence of the two exhibitions gives the opportunity to compare the work of three established southern African artists side-by-side. The contrasts are stimulating and clarifying. Above all, they point to the fact that we need to see more good exhibitions from outside our borders in order to pinpoint our own strengths and weaknesses and to occasionally knock us from our complacent plinths. **Stephen Williams**

In August Gallery Delta will feature works by Zimbabwe's prominent artists including **Jogee, Lieros, Back, Meque, Bickle, Dixon** and others.

Installation is the main feature of exhibitions in July at the National Gallery in Bulawayo. They will show three installations, one each by **Gail Strever-Morkel** from South Africa, **Mark Haddon** from Britain and **Nikunja** from Switzerland. In August, Bulawayo will host **Furniture and Furnishings** featuring one-off art items, as well as a show of **German graphics and paintings**. September sees an **Art and Craft Fair**, work by **George Nene** and the travelling **Annual Schools' Exhibition**.

A one-person show by painter **Mishek Gudo** and the **Longmans' Women Visual Artists' Exhibition** open towards the end of July at the National Gallery in Harare. In August, work by students from the **Harare Polytechnic** will be exhibited as well as paintings and graphics by Yugoslav artist, **Branko Miljus**. Two one-person shows will open in September, **Kaufman Ndlovu** and **Fani Kofi**, as well as the Bulawayo **Furniture and Furnishings** Exhibition.

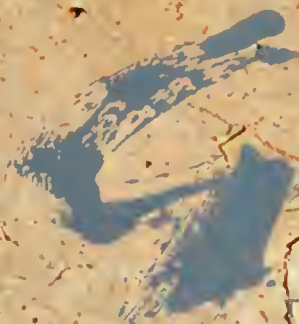
A one-person show of recent work by **Paul Wade** will open in late September at Sandro's new gallery in Belgravia.

For those travelling to or living in Britain, 75 paintings by **Robert Paul** will be exhibited in a one-man show at the Victoria Gallery in Bath opening on 28 September. This is to be the first exhibition of Paul's work in the country of his birth and hopefully, within the declared post-colonial parameters, he will receive the recognition he deserves. A book on Robert Paul's life and work, including approximately 24 full colour reproductions, will be published to accompany the exhibition.

Commonwealth Art and Craft Awards
Closing date 1 September 1996
Contact the Editor, *Gallery*, for details.



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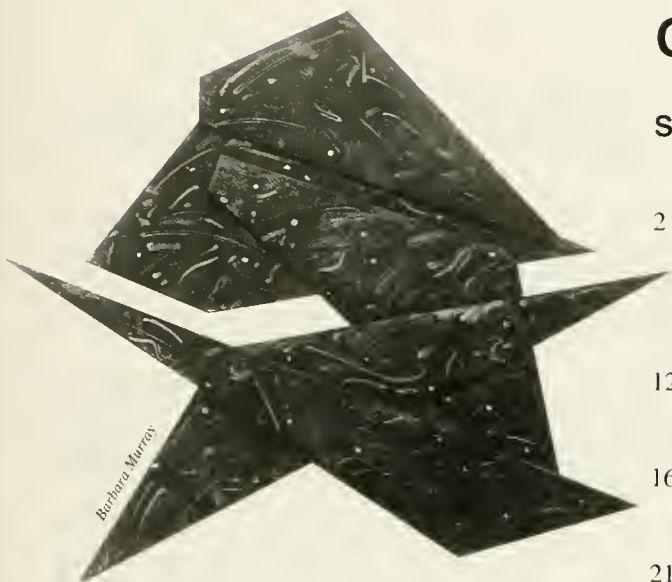
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Workshop, Namibia, 1996 (photo: Neo Matome)
Left: Stephen Williams, *Star II*, 1985, 95 x 115 x .5cm,
welded metal and paint

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Publisher: Derek Huggins. Editor: Barbara Murray. Design & typesetting:
Myrtle Mallis. Origination: HPP Studios. Printing: A.W. Bardwell & Co.
Paper: Express from Graphtec Ltd.

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Subscriptions from Gallery Publications, c/o Gallery Delta, 110 Livingstone
Avenue, P.O. Box UA 373 Union Avenue, Harare. Tel: (263-4) 792135
Fax: c/o (263-4) 753186.





a broad, deep and lasting impact

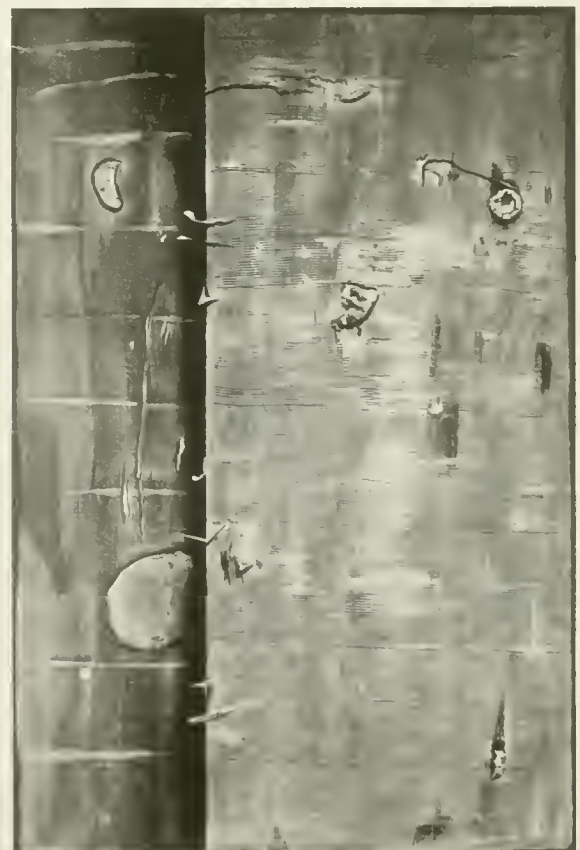
In the Bulawayo *Sunday News* of 18 June 1995, a journalist wrote: "After the initial excitement surrounding the opening of the New Gallery in Bulawayo at Douslin House, one had the feeling that the whole place was slowly falling asleep ... lethargy reigns ... Against this background has been the recent appointment of Stephen Williams as Acting Director of the Gallery." By 29 October 1995, the same journalist was able to report: "The art gallery is now a very busy place ... monthly attendance figures have jumped from just over 1000 to 7000."

This was a remarkable achievement anywhere but particularly in a small, relatively conservative city. The National Gallery in Bulawayo (NGB) had, in four months, become a centre of cultural activity. Brightly coloured flags were designed and hung from the balcony proclaiming to passersby the presence of the National Gallery. Innovative exhibitions were initiated including a display of cartoons and Flight Lieutenant Barnabus Sibanda's *Zimcopter* and *Zim Mirage* which were set up in the gallery courtyard. Exchange workshops with neighbouring countries and one person shows by young Bulawayo artists were held. Large detachments of school children, art teachers and teacher trainees regularly visited the changing exhibitions. Slide talks and lectures occurred. Videos could be seen. Visiting artists from outside the country were invited to put up installations. Jazz bands, classical ensembles and rock groups performed in the courtyard. Poetry readings were given and a drama consultancy began to operate from one of the studios. The library was revamped and promoted to the public, art students and art teachers at nearby schools and educational institutions. Weekly advertisements began to appear in the Bulawayo media informing the public about exhibitions, events, new books, activities. The NGB Newsletter was redesigned and the content improved to make it interesting and provoking reading. An enthusiastic group of volunteers came in to do promotional work such as fundraising leaving the staff to carry out their duties. Correspondence was initiated with regional and overseas art institutions. Support was obtained from embassies, leaders in business and political circles. The shop was reorganised and began to include Zimbabwean literature. All of these activities were carried out with a streamlined and now highly motivated team of staff. Glitches in administration and finance were sorted out. Computers were obtained with funds raised by the Friends of the Gallery, and put to good use. Catalogues for exhibitions took on a professional appearance. Artists from Bambazonke Harare were beginning to talk of going down to Bulawayo to exhibit. There was an influx of people involved in all branches of the arts. The NGB had become a place of geniality, interest, excitement and action; a focus for culture in both Zimbabwe and the region.

A notice in the NGB Newsletter of March 1996 announced that "Mr Stephen Williams has been appointed Regional Director with effect from 1 February 1996. Mr Williams has been acting in the position

since May 1995." The arts community of Zimbabwe breathed a sigh of relief. At last Stephen had come home, had found his place, won his official appointment and could really begin to use his many abilities. It had been a long journey, one which has now been robbed of its fulfilment.

Visiting Stephen's home one is made aware of his involvement with art. In the flat Matabeleland garden stand sculptures, his own and others, collected over time. In the house, the walls are covered with paintings, including the last large canvas he completed, *Dreams of Mhalatswe*, divided vertically into dark and dull textured gold, the junction crossed with thorns, and incorporating seed pods and metal fragments. In the garage, his 'studio', slashes of paint, reds, browns, orange, yellow, gold, straight on one side, random on the other, line upon line, month upon month of residue, cover a twenty foot long wooden 'easel' on one wall. On the floor more colour, on the end wall a ground and gleaming sculpture made from a flattened petrol drum top: the motorbike. In the shed at the back, canvases stacked against the wall and in the drawers of a paper chest, more evidence



(right) Stephen Williams, 1990
(Photo courtesy the Botswana
National Museum and Art Gallery)

(below) Stephen Williams, *Dreams
of Mhalatswe*, 1994-96, 183 x 118cm,
acrylic on canvas with mixed media

(opposite) Stephen Williams,
(title unknown), 1978, etching

Stephen Williams

of Stephen's commitment. The earliest works are pencil, conté or charcoal sketches of people and environments, student studies of nudes, watercolour landscapes. In another drawer, silkscreen prints from the time of the liberation struggle. Two simple self portraits, one alone, one with his children. The rest of the drawers spill over with landscapes, in watercolour, oil and acrylic — great swathes of sky, open stretches of dry grass veld, earth and the distant horizon; in many, the identifying gestural strokes, free, generous and alive with energy.

Stephen was an artist in love with the African landscape. He grew up in the flat open places of Matabeleland where earth is barely divided from the wide skies by a faint and distant smudge, sometimes a barely discernible difference of colour; the ground marked by scratchy brush and scrub bush, dry branches, thorns, seed pods, bones, dirt paths and roads, and scattered scraps of metal, the leavings of human, animal and plant existence. The colours of the hot African bush filled his eyes and heart.

Stephen had come to this country in 1956 at the age of eight. He emigrated with his parents from Barry, South Wales, to Bulawayo, Southern Rhodesia, where his father had been a flight instructor with the RAF during World War 2. He completed his schooling in Bulawayo and began studies for CIS. But this early choice of career was disrupted by political developments in the country. In 1969, rather than serve call-up in the Rhodesian army, fighting for a government whose policies he detested, Stephen left for Britain. He got factory work, travelled to the USA, and completed two terms study at the West of England Academy of Art in Bristol. Returning to Bulawayo in 1971, he held his first one person exhibition at Naake's Gallery and became a close friend of Marshall Baron, abstract expressionist, musician, lawyer and political activist. It was a relationship which had a lasting influence on his life. In 1972 he travelled to Malawi and Mozambique, completed his CIS and went to Botswana to work for a firm of chartered accountants. While developing his management, administrative and financial abilities, he

continued to paint, having a solo exhibition at the National Gallery of Botswana in 1973.

The pull of the wild places of Botswana and his love of landscape led to a year spent collecting insects, working briefly for tsetse control and painting watercolour landscapes in the Okavango. During this time he realised that if art was to be the passion in his life he should do a degree in fine art and he enrolled at Natal University. Then, not having completed his degree, he spent a year working as a station foreman in Serule, Botswana, painted his "Tyrannicide series" and broke his arm in a motorcycle accident. In 1978, he went to Michaelis School of Art in Cape Town to complete his degree, also travelling to the Transkei and Lesotho.

Stephen's restless search and energy during these years formed a basis for his future. With his love of discussion and his gentle, easy-going nature, he made friends everywhere he went, absorbing ideas and influences from the many cultures he came across, reducing barriers and tensions, creating understanding. His art became strongly political. In the conservative context of Bulawayo in the late 70s, at the height of the bloody and vicious racial war, art was one way in which disagreement with government policy could be expressed. A series of large square canvases appeared, one a vibrant red square cut with a giant X within a solid black border expressing much of Stephen's abhorrence of the divisive and destructive war. Another work, an etching from 1978, at the time of the election of the interim government, another ploy by the whites to retain power through a puppet coalition government, reveals his attitude.

On independence in 1980, Stephen returned to Zimbabwe and immediately set about contributing actively to the community both in political and cultural ways. He took up a post as lecturer in painting, drawing, graphics and history of art at the Bulawayo Technical College, was one of the judges for the 13th Annual Schools' Exhibition, executed a mural for the Ministry of Manpower and continued his own painting. In 1981, he exhibited work in Maputo

Stephen Williams, Regional Director of the National Gallery in Bulawayo, artist, teacher, writer, promoter, catalyst, administrator and friend, has died, aged 47, as the result of injuries sustained in a motorcycle accident. Our loss is incalculable. Gallery will, in a future issue, publish an appreciation of Stephen's contribution to Zimbabwean art through his painting and sculpture. This article brings together the memories of a few of Stephen's friends and colleagues in tribute





(top) Stephen Williams, *The Veteran Nationalists*, 1983, silkscreen print

(middle) Stephen Williams, *Lenin and Rebecca*, 1982, silkscreen print

(below) Stephen Williams, *Bourgeois and Proletarians*, 1983, silkscreen print

and London, and moved to the United College of Education where he taught art and sociology. This led to a decision to study for a BSc (Special Honours) in sociology at the University of Zimbabwe in 1982, doing his dissertation on *The Question of Unity in Zimbabwean Politics*. After the initial relief at the end of the war and independence, the horror of the genocide in Matabeleland, Stephen's home area, and disillusion with the new power elite entered his work. His artistic ability was used to practical ends, as a way to influence and contribute to change in society. Composition, colour and content combined to express his deeply held convictions that unity, compromise and co-existence are essential for life. Some idea of Stephen's commitment to politics and art during this time is described in the following extract from a tribute to Stephen written by Jeremy Brickhill:

"I first met Stephen Williams in 1981 when I was still serving in the Zimbabwe People's Revolutionary Army (ZPRA). He approached me through a mutual friend and invited me to meet him at the old rambling house he rented in Hillside Road in Bulawayo. Stephen had obviously read and thought a lot about politics and could talk at length about political theory, but at our first meeting he came straight to the point. 'I know you've been fighting for ZAPU,' he told me, 'and I support ZAPU too. I haven't been involved in the liberation struggle before but if there is anything I can do now, just ask.' 'Why ZAPU?' I asked. 'Because ZAPU's non-racial progressive nationalism is what I believe we need in Zimbabwe, and well, I'm a Bulawayo boy!' he answered smiling that serene smile of his. So started 15 years of friendship and shared comradeship.

When Dumiso Dabengwa, Lookout Masuku and other ZPRA commanders were detained along with hundreds of other party activists I followed up Stephen's offer of help to ZAPU. His response was characteristically unhesitating and reliable. Whether we needed help with transport, or a bed for the night for someone in trouble, or help with food or money, Stephen was there. He soon became and remained a reliable rear base. In a time when fair weather comrades and friends were running for cover, Stephen's quiet courage and commitment did not go unnoticed. Unassuming, generous and sensitive, he quickly became a trusted comrade and friend among people who took great care where to place their trust and friendship.

During this same period I and others were also involved in establishing co-operatives among demobilised ex-combatants. Our political ambitions to keep the socialist flag flying were however undermined by our almost complete lack of business skills. My own co-operative, the Memorial Co-operative Society (MCS) had established a printing business, and like many other co-operatives we were floundering. We approached Stephen for help and he quickly agreed, moved to Harare and joined us as Production Manager. Stephen's methodical approach was just what we needed to counteract our guerilla-inspired utopian socialism. Over the year he worked with us Stephen systematically reorganised the production process, leaving behind the solid foundation that has kept our co-operative in business until now.

As you can imagine, political discussions rather than profits kept us going and Stephen loved the comradeship and never-ending debate. He painted and designed too, and joined our other artists in producing a steady stream of agit-prop materials. Stephen's painting during this period reflected his growing participation in and knowledge of the nationalist movement. He contributed to the flow of ideas through discussions and painting, and very importantly for us, through commitment. He was not just interpreting events as an artist, he was prepared to be involved. I well remember Stephen somewhat tongue-in-cheek, rephrasing Karl Marx in one of our weekly political discussion meetings: 'Artists have always interpreted the world, the point however is to change it!'

His participation in the co-operative movement gave him access in conditions of trust and comradeship to the ex-combatant community and enabled Stephen to introduce art to many people who had previously believed art plays no part in politics or indeed in everyday life. Stephen encouraged us all to see art not only as a reflection of the world, but also as a means of influencing ideas and changing how people saw the world. And so in those days it was not unusual to see former guerillas at exhibitions in the company of Stephen, arguing and discussing a painting or a sculpture.

In return, these former guerillas gave Stephen their dreams, memories and experiences from which he was able to fashion new images and interpretations. His silkscreen series *Veteran Nationalists* undoubtedly owes something to one of those nights when we reminisced around the fire, whilst *Lenin and Rebecca* and *Bourgeois and Proletarians* surely emerged from the bubbling pot of our feverish Marxism and attempts to implement socialist policies in the co-operative movement.

It was during this crazy tumultuous time that Stephen and I spent a great deal of time together. Often Stephen would paint while I wrote and talked with him. Occasionally we had to do something fairly hair-raising and I quickly learned that Stephen was the sort of person you could trust in a tight spot; always reliable and always calm.

We often went with comrades to listen to music, watch a play or football. Stephen was popular with everyone and was welcome wherever he went. His special friends though were two young artists, Thabisa Masuku and Doolan Dube, both sadly now dead. Stephen was their mentor, and as so many other artist know, Stephen was a man you could always talk to about your struggles with your work. So Stephen became part of our family, a family not unlike the family of artists. (Like artists we also knew what it was like to be swept down a raging stream, needing a trusted hand to hold onto.) And now our trusted rear base, our comrade and companion is gone. We are left with memories and paintings which are not enough, but for which we are very thankful."

In 1984, Stephen was appointed manager of Mzilikazi Art and Craft Centre in Bulawayo which gave him further opportunity to unite his passionate commitment to art and socialist politics. Under Stephen's able direction Mzilikazi became an important fine art training facility for the region, educating some of Zimbabwe's well-known artists. Always looking to reach beyond limitations, Stephen instigated evening classes to provide opportunities for those in full-time employment and at one time approximately 200 children from schools that did not offer art as part of their curricula received instruction in drawing and painting at Mzilikazi. His time in the co-operative movement and at the university studying sociology had developed and broadened his vision and he began to write papers and articles which should become the underlying policy documents of art and culture in Zimbabwe. In an article for *Insight*, Stephen wrote:

"The Mzilikazi Centre [has] played an important role in engendering alternative forms of cultural expression, and, in a small way, helped to bring about change ... From its inception it has had the primary objective of offering skills training to school-leavers thereby equipping them with the means to support themselves once they have completed their courses. Additionally it offers employment to the disadvantaged members of society in the pottery production unit. This aspect of service to the community has combined with the stated cultural objectives to provide a unique setting for artistic production with a clear social perspective, rather than the pursuit of art for its own sake.

Students were encouraged to paint what was happening around them, to comment on and record the reality of their daily lives ... it [had] the effect — as art is always capable of doing — of raising the consciousness of both the artist and the onlooker by stressing particular views of society.

... the Mzilikazi Art and Craft Centre was envisaged as a community centre, intended to encourage the growth and development of cultural activities and the discovery and promotion of artistic talent amongst the working-class peoples of Bulawayo's western areas. This ideal has been consistently adhered to, even under the most difficult conditions and it is hoped that in the future the Centre will be able to increase this contribution to the community."

Stephen managed Mzilikazi from 1984 to 1989, teaching and encouraging the artists, and also making sure that their work got recognition beyond Bulawayo by bringing it to Harare for exhibition. During this time he was appointed to the Bulawayo Arts Council and the Committee of the Bulawayo Art Gallery. He was a judge for the 1984 Zimbabwe Annual Exhibition, attended the Issues for the Next Generation conference in Toronto, visited Paul Goodwin in Milan, organised a public sculpture exhibition in Bulawayo which caused more stir than anyone would have thought possible, and had exhibitions of his own work, painting, sculpture and ceramics, which continued to reflect his experiences and his love of the open landscapes of Africa. 1986 saw his work selected for an award of merit in the Zimbabwe Annual, included in the Zimbabwean exhibition to the USSR, GDR and Bulgaria and exhibited in a two-person show at Gallery Delta. Derek Huggins writes:

"Stephen was a man of many roles all rolled into one. We at Gallery Delta first met him in the early 80s and watched his career with interest. Most of his paintings related to the landscape which he loved. I recall a series of paintings of Matabeleland which tended to abstraction — executed about the mid 80s — which glowed in their intensity of light and colour. Later he painted abstract hard-edged paintings with prominent zig-zag lightning-like markings. There was his love of Botswana and the San people whom he visited. This took him back to abstracting from the landscape and his exhibition entitled *The Botswana Landscape and Other Non-Figurative Paintings* at Gallery Delta in 1992. It was a good show in which big, broad, expansive and abstracted landscapes with markings like bones in the sand were prominent. Later in 1994, there was the show entitled *Time and Space* in which his work explored surface and texture, predominantly in gold and silver paint, and the effect of the light playing over their surfaces. This he was developing in work which has yet to be shown.



Stephen Williams, *Umbane Linyoka*, 1986, 92 x 92cm, oil on canvas



Barbara Murray

Stephen Williams, (title unknown), 1987, 15 x 21cm, acrylic on paper

I last saw Stephen in Bulawayo a few weeks ago; as always, the clean-cut, virile, good-looking Stephen with the trimmed beard and lithe strong physique. I remarked to myself that he was glowing. He was assured and confident, busy but all under control. The Gallery was looking perfect; his desk neat and tidy and all his information stowed on the computer. He was warm and welcoming and genial. He had everything within his grasp. He was happy. We had liaised and worked together to put in a show for the young New Directions painters and sculptors from Bulawayo and Harare. After the opening we had dinner together at his home — Stephen and Neo, Rashid, Veryan, Hilary and myself. He was excited about the prospect of future liaison and we talked about putting in a similar show next year at Bulawayo and then taking it through in our cars to Gaborone and then an adventure in the desert. He talked a little of himself and his plans for the Gallery. Stephen had a good mind and clear thoughts, and he had the practical experience to go with it. He had a good sense of his own purpose, of his role as artist, director, promoter. He realised that he had to encourage, to nurture, to support and promote the young artists of Bulawayo. We were looking to him to break us into the region, as much as him bringing the region into Bulawayo. Already in a short time he had turned the Gallery around — promoting music and theatre and lectures and attracting artists from the region and from overseas. He was talking about three years to break out the young artists of Bulawayo and I warned him that it might take five to seven years. He was unsure if he had the time ... he had to travel to Sweden, there was the art critics' conference in London, there was an offer from an American university to do his PhD. But he was intent to stay at Bulawayo and manage all. He had the good of the majority at heart and would fit himself around it as best he could. Stephen was a leader and a catalyst; he was an ally; he was doing good things, great things and we were with him, watching with interest and admiration and respect, and wanting and expecting him to go further. Stephen saw his role and he was matching it and excelling in it. There is so much still to do ... but we have his example."

In 1987, Stephen was founding chairperson of the Visual Artists' Association of Bulawayo (VAAB) a body which he continued to contribute to and encourage. He won a prize for sculpture in the Weldart Exhibition of 1987 and then, having been awarded a scholarship by the British Council, he left to study for an MA in Art and Design Education at Leicester Polytechnic (now De Montfort University). His thesis was entitled Perspectives on Art and Design Education in Zimbabwe.

So by 1988 Stephen had a unique combination of qualifications: CIS, BA(Fine Art), BSc (Sp. Hons. Sociology) and MA (Art and Design Education) as well as wide practical experience in many fields and, above all, a passionate commitment to art. He would have been the correct choice for the post of Director of the National Gallery, however political powers decided otherwise and Stephen left for Botswana where he became Senior Curator of Art with the National Museum and Art Gallery in Gaborone. The workshop movement was gaining momentum in southern African countries and Stephen, who fully supported the concept of such hands-on experience and interchange of ideas, became founding deputy chairperson of the Thapong International Artists' Workshop Trust and attended the first Thapong Workshop in Kanye.

His knowledge, personality and work gained him a strong reputation, and in 1990 he was appointed Acting Director of the Botswana National Museum and Art Gallery, a position which he held until 1992. In an article in *The Zebra's Voice*, the newsletter of the Botswana Museum and Art Gallery, Stephen wrote:

"Throughout Africa the study of national art has never been afforded the prominence it deserves. Isolated aspects of African art have been well documented but, in general, studies have centred on ethnographic considerations which view the visual arts in terms of objects and paintings rather than as a living and dynamic form of expression. This attitude is apparent in the scarcity of national art

galleries on the continent in relation to the number of museums. The roots of this situation can be traced to the colonial cultural policy which viewed African culture as static and belonging to the past. Visual art which evolved as a fusion of traditional and western values was ignored.

... the visual arts remain relatively undeveloped due to the lack of emphasis in the education system and to inadequate support for the creation of art in general. It is towards the challenge of correcting this situation that the newly constituted National Art Gallery directs itself."

During these years besides rising to the challenges he had set himself within the Botswana community, he attended the Culture and Development conference in Copenhagen, launched an Mzilikazi exhibition in Sweden, exhibited his own work in Stockholm, visited London and Paris, organised the SADCC 10th Anniversary Exhibition in Botswana and the Art From the Frontline exhibition for the Glasgow Art Gallery, Scotland. He was appointed external examiner for art for three years to the Molepole College of Education, attended the Triangle Artists' Workshop in Pine Plains, New York, and helped organise and attended the annual Thapong Workshops. He was a judge for the Standard Bank Biennale in Windhoek, lectured at Mpapa Gallery in Lusaka, and took part in the Fourth Havana Biennale in Cuba. This list of activities can in no way describe, though we can be sure of, his active and energetic participation in all aspects of them.

In 1992, Stephen came back to Zimbabwe as Project Manager for the SADCC Regional School of Art and Design (RSAD). This was an enterprise dear to his heart and one for which he was well suited. He and Neo Matome travelled throughout the region, meeting artists and educators, visiting art institutions, talking to government and private representatives in the arts fields, getting information and making contacts in order to form a clear and practical foundation on which the RSAD could be set up. The frustrations were many, not least the complete indifference with which the project has been viewed by Zimbabwean officials in the last few years. Despite lethargy and opposition from his 'colleagues' on the project, Stephen continued to fight for what he saw as a major initiative for the whole southern African arts community. The completion of the RSAD report was followed up by papers, lectures and articles, locally, regionally and overseas, in an attempt to persuade officialdom to move on. In one such article Stephen wrote:

"The rationale behind the regional art school project is the bringing together of the different artists, traditions and cultures that make up the region in a spirit of learning, research and the central development of visual art in southern Africa ... The school is intended to operate on several different levels — degree, diploma, certificate, artists in residence — to make allowances for the fact that many of the region's top artists do not have academic backgrounds, a factor which should not exclude them from the school or deprive students of the experience of working and learning from them ... the true potential of the region's artists remains relatively untapped.

Areas such as the theory and history of art are still undeveloped and the most crucial area of art education has been neglected in comparison to other disciplines ...

The RSAD provides an opportunity ... from which could emerge a new direction for art in the region, a new way of thinking about art and a new spirit of regionalism amongst the artists of southern Africa ...

Art education ... needs to be recognised as the wholly appropriate and powerful developmental tool which it is capable of being ...

An overriding result of the lack of educational and art support facilities ... is not only a diminished sense of cultural identity but also an almost non-existent art market ...

The response to the project proposal in the SADC countries to date has been overwhelmingly positive. Above all there is recognition in the region that a new way of looking at the visual arts is vital in order to counter an inexorable slide into the realm of commodity and curios ...

There is growing recognition that art can in fact help transform societies, and that culture has an important and valuable role to play in developmental aims."

In another article for an exhibition catalogue in 1989, Stephen had written:

"Many countries in southern Africa, still maintain stronger cultural ties with their former colonising powers in Europe than they do with some of their regional neighbours. It is in this context that the value of bringing together art works and artists from these countries in forums such as this should be assessed."

Stephen's travels throughout the region in the early 90s confirmed this approach and it was in this spirit that he returned to Bulawayo in 1994 to set up Artconsult with his partner, Neo Matome. He became a valued contributor to *Gallery* and the *Zimbabwean Review*, was appointed to the board of the National Gallery in Bulawayo and the committee of VAAB, took on the role of external examiner and consultant for the fine art department of Chancellor College in Malawi, travelled to Sweden and continued to exhibit his own work both within Zimbabwe and abroad. Stephen was given the President's Award for Distinction for overall contribution to the arts in Zimbabwe as well as the Award for Distinction in Painting for his large canvas, *Ramatea*, at the 1992 Annual Heritage Exhibition.



Stephen Williams, *Ramatea*, 1989-91, 200 x 150cm, acrylic on canvas

In 1995, on the resignation of the Director of the National Gallery in Bulawayo, Stephen was asked to take on the post of Acting Director. Voti Thebe, whose career with the Gallery in Bulawayo stretches back to the early 70s spoke about his relationship with Stephen:

"I met Stephen round about 76/77, when I was working at the old Bulawayo Gallery. Each time he came in he would spend some time with me. We would talk about this and that, about art and the artist's life. When he was doing the survey for the RSAD he came to see me, to ask my opinion, whether I was for the idea of this school. I had my reservations. My own vision was to start from the grassroots and go up. Stephen said, 'Voti, I accept your idea but we could also start from the top and filter down and have another movement up from grassroot level, meeting at a point. When they meet it is bound to regenerate the whole arts community.' He thought that the time was right to capture the intellectuals and the political leaders, to get them dancing, that way art would go through the whole society.

Right from when he started as Acting Director there were changes. He was a man of vision. He looked at the structures, at what was happening, at the thrust of the exhibitions. He started trimming the staff. It was painful because some of the people had been here for a long time but they were not performing well. Now the Gallery is running well. He saw the need to encourage the Bulawayo artists, to nurture them, to show work with substance even if it was not of the highest calibre, to support wherever there was something going on.

Stephen would come to me and we would sit down and discuss how we could reach the people. We started jazz evenings, plays and the like, poetry reading. It changed the whole concept of the Gallery. It became a culture house. The Friends of the Gallery were worried that this would take the focus off the visual arts but Stephen said let the people come in and then we can point them in the direction of art. Soon we had many more people coming in. The administration in Harare would say 'No, no, you can't do that.' But Stephen would talk to them and persuade them.

Stephen believed that the Bulawayo Gallery should be autonomous to some degree. The Gallery began to make its own decisions, to show its own exhibitions and start its own activities. Buying for the permanent collection was previously always done in Harare but Stephen persuaded them that sometimes we should choose here, from this region, that this Gallery should reflect the art of Bulawayo in its collection. Our collection, since he came in, has started to get a local flavour. There should be a dialogue between the artists and the Gallery because without the artists the Gallery would be nothing. Stephen was an artist himself so he could understand both sides, the administration problems and the artists' needs. He made sure the rents for the studios were low so artists could afford to work for art not just for sales.

Stephen was always ready to try, to take a chance and see what would happen; to bring in new ideas and artists. One thing I learned from Steve was an openness to ideas. We had a stand at the Trade Fair. Somebody phoned and offered a stand and Steve just said, 'Let's do it!' It was a first ever. He would grab the opportunity. He used to say let's not use the well-trodden road, let's start another track here, something new.

He was an encourager and he had a listening ear. His office was always a hive of activity, with local artists, with business and government people, with people just walking in. You didn't need an appointment. Someone could just walk in. Stephen was a man of the people. He had a sharp memory for people, was easy to talk to and he always made time to listen.

The relationship Steve built up with the public was very good. He brought in new people, new ideas, kept in touch with all sorts of people and involved them in the Gallery. People began to feel they were a part of the Gallery. Working with Stephen has given us a double dose of energy and morale."

Stephen made a lasting impact on many lives. Styx Mhlanga, a drama consultant using one of the NGB studios talked about the opportunities Stephen had given him:

"Stephen changed the direction of my life. When he was at Mzilikazi, he travelled to Canada and met some people who were interested in grassroots' theatre. When he came back he went to CUSO and proposed the idea of training actors. CUSO agreed to fund so Stephen came to Bulawayo and persuaded people at the City Council to work with them and the programme began of which I was part. Because of Steve I became an actor and got involved in producing theatre. It is what I am still doing now, what I love. He was just like a brother. Everytime I had an idea, I could tell him, and one way or another he would give me a push.

He had this talent of making two opposite parties come together, of finding a compromise, of defusing a situation that was dangerous. He is the guy who understood what is happening on the other side of the town, and people from all sides, all ages. He was a person that was rich — he was both an artist and a good administrator, two qualities that are rare in one person. Guys that are good artists are usually terrible administrators. And if you find people who are good administrators they are usually not sympathetic to artists. Artists can feel exploited when someone who doesn't love art tries to administrate. When you went into his office you never came out disappointed. He would not give you something that would disadvantage other people, but make sure that the solution was good for everyone involved. He got everybody to work together. If he said no, he would give you reasons that would make you happy.

There were these artists who were from Beira on a workshop here. Stephen encouraged me to meet them, to go to Beira also and get involved in drama there. He was good, wherever he travelled or when any visitors came, he helped people to make contact. He was always looking for new avenues he could open.

People that can understand the community, all the different sectors, that can make them feel the Gallery is their place, those people are few. You have to make people understand what the Gallery stands for and to accommodate them within that. Steve could put a different angle, a different perspective on things."

Rashid Jogee, painter and longtime close friend, found it hard to talk about the important place Stephen had in his existence:

"Stephen acted as a stabiliser for me, okay. Because Stephen was there I could have these greater freedoms. Now I'm even worried that they don't exist anymore. He used to say 'It's a great life if you don't weaken.'

I met Stephen with Marshall, when they had an exhibition at Naakes'. We had this great similarity, we liked the same kind of music. 'Cause one thing we had in common, me I love Neil Young and Stephen also, he loved Neil Young, we used to sing those same songs together. I first invited Stephen to my flat when I was painting, experimenting. I had received my call-up papers, it was 76, and I really thought I was going to die in the war. I thought I would use up everything I had, all my life, all my paint, in one day and then the next morning I would pack up and go to the army. So I painted my whole flat, everything, and then I got hold of a phone and I said, 'Hey Stephen, it's Rashid, can you come and see my exhibition.'

When Marshall passed away I was in the bush. I returned all alone to my flat, started up my painting, started my life again, Stephen appeared. He used to pitch up in the yard where I was painting, on his bike. We used to talk about everything. So Steve and I, as a partnership, we survived the war. When it got so bleak and dark. I can't explain how black it was here in Bulawayo, it was so dark, just before handover, Stephen and I were still painting.

Stephen used to come and go. His visits were momentous and then he'd throw me a pack of Gauloise and off he'd go. At crucial moments he'd arrive. Even with the racial division and everything, the ventures and the strivings that we had to make to reach each other, they were great.

Stephen was my teacher. I quote Stephen Williams: 'Even if you go and study basketry tomorrow well and good, whatever you can learn, learn it.' Steve told me, 'The basis of art, my friend, is drawing.' He said, 'Rashid take life drawing as the most serious subject.' And he was totally correct. I can't deny it. Our frustration, our argument was really the same thing, Stephen and I okay. Stephen used to say, 'The abstract art school was born in the 50s. We're now in 1996 and we're still trying to provide an argument for what we're doing.' He was a teacher to me. He taught me to paint. In many ways he taught me to do it. Just by encouraging me. Then in my own painting I found my own methods, the things I wanted to paint. Well he propagated that in many ways, his whole image, even if he didn't have to do anything. He just had to sit in the chair and be there, Stephen Williams. He was an idol, an image for me okay. And that's why I'm complaining, losing my nut, I'm a painter but I need other painters to see and look upon, to dazzle me, or to lead me to new horizons.

Stephen was a great workshop person. He was everybody's brother. He was everybody's son. He was everybody's nephew, I tell you that. I had already coined a phrase for Stephen as manager of workshops. I called him the invisible manager, okay. This guy is here but he's not really here, he's invisible.

I tell you I don't want to think too much when I think of the void, the consequence, what it means, hey I get very, very depressed. If you are living art, you like to see art live, to see its process acted out. Stephen was a painter himself, he had his own struggles. We had the same discovery, that you had to destroy things totally to get reborn. Stephen has achieved things for me. Here is a man who changed my life. I tell you honestly, he changed my life. Even in me, there is some of him that's living in me, he's changed some things in me because of that interaction, that contact. He was very powerful. We need people to take control. We need some leaders. His objectivity was there, I don't mind working under him. Even when there was chaos, that objectivity was there, it was as solid as a rock because it was true, it was right."

Running through Stephen's life was another passion, motorbikes. Below are some parts of Steve Harpt's Requiem for a Biker:

"Stephen wasn't a bike fanatic but he did appreciate being able to get

out into the bush on a bike. I first met Stephen in 1981 at the Haskins motorcycle shop in Francistown, working on his Yamaha XT500 before a trip into the Makgadikgadi Pans. The trip was 6 days travelling in vehicles and bikes via Gweta to the Boteti River which was in full flood. That was August 1981, one of the last years of the massive migrations of animals to the Boteti. On our way out from the river, the area was literally covered with wildlife from one horizon to the next.

On that trip I had no bike but by December I had an XT500 of my own and that was when the fun really began. Stephen and I would get together whenever possible. We would always take time out for at least one jaunt into the rural areas on our bikes or down a small track he made or out to the Matopos. He was a good rider and normally got there before me, although speed was never really the point. Rather it was the freedom from all that we did on a daily basis. It was being out ... on the loose ... the fresh air ... the excitement of being able to go anywhere!

The trip that had the biggest impact on us was one to Kubu Island, across Sua Pan from what is now the Soda Ash Plant. The island is a large rocky outcrop covered with baobabs. We thought we had it all figured out ... just 50kms due southeast from the spit. We had photo maps, a compass and an odometer. What more could we need?

When our bikes finally came to a muddy sinking halt, we had travelled 45kms and the island should have been clearly visible. It wasn't. After stepping back and reassessing the situation, we decided that we were in fact stuck in the bowels of the southern part of Sua Pan with only two very faint points of land visible. In a radius of 360 degrees, there was absolutely nothing to see except two worried boys up to their axles in hot sticky mud. Things were looking about as bleak as they ever had in my life. Why did we only bring 10 litres of water we asked ourselves. And the heat! The mud was almost too hot to dig out from the wheels. It would collect under the rear mud-guard until it was packed solid and would then act like a brake on the back wheel. When the bike stops, it sinks.

Stephen decided we should head for the faint point of land to the northwest. The routine was to dig out as much of the mud as you could and then try to get the bike moving, in first gear, pushing and running alongside. As it gathered momentum you'd jump on and see if the surface of the pan could accommodate your weight. If the bike was sinking, you'd jump off again and start running until you picked up more speed. But we were both fully loaded with gear so once you managed to get on the bike, it was just a matter of time, a kilometre or two, before the 'brake' would start to operate again and it was back to digging and running.



Stephen Williams on a trip through the Sua Pans, Botswana

Steve Harpt



Barbara Murray

Stephen Williams, *Terra Incognita 8*, 1994, 151 x 200cm, acrylic on canvas

After a couple of hours of this we were exhausted, thirsty and covered with salt. Just a little bit of water to rinse the salt off our faces? No, we couldn't afford to do that. As the land loomed closer, we stepped up our efforts. Stephen was first to arrive at the large baobab on the eastern side of the island while I was still digging out for the last time. When I reached him, we were like kids, jumping up and down, hugging each other, shouting 'We're still alive. We're still alive!' We were still short of water but things were definitely looking up. We spent the night next to the tree, cooking on a fire, reliving the day we would never forget.

The next morning we contemplated the way out. We had two choices: up the western side of the pan or travel along the sandy road which goes from the island to the Nata-Maun Road, about 100kms either way. We chose the pan and after about half an hour travelling we found a large pool of water. It was the end of our small emergency. Water, our last essential need, was there in front of us. We washed up and took some photographs. The rest of the day was as it was supposed to be, roaming along the edge of the pan, checking out this or that, stopping for a shot of whisky, or just racing out into the nothingness.

Riding on the salt pans is like being in a plane above the clouds or drifting in the ocean. As far as you can see there is simply nothing except the pan. With no reference points, you may think you are travelling in a straight line but that's rarely possible. At best, it's a slight arc which leaves you far from the mark after 40 or 50kms. It is a rare feeling ... setting up camp in the middle of the pan where there is absolute silence, watching the moon rise, riding with just the moonlight illuminating the way. Setting off again in the morning ... for the pure pleasure of it.

Experiences like this provided Stephen with inspiration for his painting. All around his hut were photos of the pans reminding him of the colours one sees there. Stephen tried to get other people to participate in art and experience the joys that came with it. I think his own art was actually secondary to promoting the field and generating excitement.

So why ride a bike? I don't deny that there might be an adrenalin factor or that riding a bike is a way to thumb your nose at the ultra-civilised road the world seems to be going on. But basically it is for the pure enjoyment of getting outside ... going somewhere you haven't been before. The freedom it affords is something you never forget."

There seems no way to convey what Stephen meant to so many people. He was a man with a gift for life and for art, and he shared and multiplied those gifts with everyone he knew. We are lucky to have known and loved him. Andrew Whaley writes:

"Stephen is my introduction to Bulawayo — a gatekeeper to a city. The Bulawayo that he lets me glimpse is old, even a little grandiloquent, but it exudes a fervour that is exciting. I am keen to experience some of it, this knowledge that he carries just by coming from Skies. What I later learn from Stephen is that he represents something quintessentially Bulawayo, or rather an enlightenment that we now recognise as the civilising heart of Bulawayo and its countless artists in performance, paint, pottery, metal, wood and sandstone. I want to know all of it and Stephen in a way that personifies the sandstone city for me, slows me down. In good time. Stephen is not in a rush and he will not instantly divulge its secrets.

For as long as I have known Stephen, he has defended the interests of a city that seemed permanently under seige — from its first settlements, federation days, through UDI, into independence, post-independence, unity days and today when it seeks simply water. Stephen has supported any move to bring life to the old city, any way possible of bringing its citizens together.

In the National Gallery in Bulawayo, he had the perfect mould and it's easy to forget just how simply he slipped into the cast, how perfectly it suited him, how effortlessly he seemed to be a part of its creation. In any shape an art future had in Bulawayo, Stephen seemed to be superimposed onto it years before it began to blossom into the civic structure we see today.

The times I have known Stephen — when he is not the nomad pursuing a career at university, here or overseas, or being the regional art diplomat or setting up art networks in Gaborone, Harare, Stockholm, or zooming off into the Kalahari on his bike, or up Africa in a Land Rover with Paul Goodwin or wherever he went — he's at home in Bulawayo just getting on with it. He turns the Mzilikazi Art and Craft Centre from a hobbled municipal outlet which churns out turd-brown and sinus-green earthenware into a vital institute which puts colour into the pottery, some funky design, holds art exhibitions and gives the welded metal sculptors an oxyacetylene boost into the limelight. The moment Dumiso Dabengwa is released from prison, he grabs him to open a show of young students at Mzilikazi, sometime in 1986.

He turns the old stone Hillside house he bought for a song into a great home full of earlier Stephen figurative works and always a fine selection of music which he brings back from his many travels. He has friends from all these places who come and visit and somehow, Bulawayo is a magical place to all of them. Stephen resides in its allure, its bite, its edge of desert exhilaration and the city's little tristia. I can't think of all of this and not think romantically about the place — and Stephen, on his motorbike zooming off into the bush or braaing meat and talking out the back of his house, under the stars, somehow always conducted a long, romantic love affair with Bulawayo perhaps also because he could get away.

Stephen is a link back to Marshall Baron and a way forward with the San paintings of Botswana. In between there is a full and remarkable association with so many painters and sculptors — Paul Goodwin, Reuben Crowe, Berry Bickle, Rashid Jogee whom he always called Zimbabwe's greatest painter, Voti Thebe, Charles Msimanga, Tomy Ndebele, Sam Songo, Joseph Muzondo, Mary Davies plus the international artists. Stephen is the first Zimbabwean to go to a Triangle Workshop in New York and he loves

the cut and thrust of the Americans, the critiques and of course the complete understanding of abstract, and he despises the utter lack of understanding of the Americans for African contemporary work. Stephen is in Sweden at workshops, and in South Africa. He sets up more workshops in Botswana. He is a steaming networker, meticulous and even ruthless at times and he gets, a lot of the time, what he wants.

Stephen has put out many feelers all over the globe but his root taps into Skies and, yes somehow, it is still there. It is hard to dissociate Stephen Williams from the present, impossible to lock him away in the past. I am not being coy when I say that, in a lot of ways that Bulawayo knows about, Stephen lives."

Those who take on a leading role in southern Africa's cultural sphere have many fights to fight and a great deal of commitment is necessary. The visual arts still have a weak foundation compared to other arts such as music, dance and theatre, and huge efforts have to be made to win support and recognition for their role in the development of the society. Stephen leaves behind not only his example but also a wealth of writings about the arts, art education, and the role of the arts in our community in its historical context. It is time to take them off the shelf and re-read them with an eye on the possibilities for action — theory is of no use unless it can be made to work for the good of the people. Great efforts must be made to keep up all that Stephen has put in motion.

Stephen Williams dedicated himself, with love, energy, intelligence and hard work, to art in Africa; to creating environments in which people could find their place and develop their talents; to a community in which art and artists could flourish. We are privileged to have known him, even though it was for far too short a time.



Stephen Williams, *Culture in the Time of Drought*, 1992, 54 x 72cm, watercolour





Mountains of the moon

Workshops provide a stimulating environment in which artists can meet, create and exchange ideas. The Botswana painter and writer, Neo Matome, reports from Namibia

From 11 to 25 May 1996, the Tulipamwe International Artists' Workshop took place in Namibia at the incredibly atmospheric Zebra River Lodge run by Rob and Marian Field. The lodge is located in the heart of the Tsaris Mountains, approximately 250kms south-west of Windhoek and 90kms from Sesriem and Sossusvlei. The dramatic surroundings are reminiscent of a moonscape with their craggy, granite mountains, infinite sky and endless rocky vistas. During the intense two-week period of the workshop when we were looked after and fed like royalty, this isolated environment with its harsh beauty became a focal point and source of inspiration for the invited participants.

In all, 25 artists — painters, sculptors and printmakers — from diverse backgrounds took part. Fourteen were Namibians and the rest came from France, Zambia, Germany, India, Kenya, Réunion, South Africa, Spain,



(top) View of workshop site at Zebra River Lodge

(above) Participants at a group critique



(above) Job Jonathan
(Namibia)
working on his installation

(below) Textile
by Voti Thebe
(Zimbabwe)



Botswana, United Kingdom and Zimbabwe. A strong spirit of camaraderie prevailed throughout the course of the workshop thus enabling the artists to freely interact with each other. There was also a good supply of materials ranging from paints, printing inks and fabric dyes through to sculpting tools, stone, wood and found objects. The workshop was punctuated by 'walkabouts' or group critiques whereby each artist was given feedback about his or her work by the rest of the group. In the evenings slide shows of artworks by the different artists were held so as to provide insight into how each participant approached his or her imagery and to stimulate discussion about the role and value of art in society. The night occasionally rounded off by singing to guitar accompaniment, around a fire, under the stars.

In terms of the output of the workshop, some of the most interesting art was produced by Anita Dube, an Indian artist. She created soft sculpture, made from blue velvet decorated with sequins and silver thread, resembling a stretched animal skin. The idea of life and death existing simultaneously in the barren Namibian landscape influenced the work. It challenges us to examine our hopes, fears and understanding of life and death by presenting us with the paradoxical image of death beautified. By so doing, Dube subtly alludes to the concept of hope and rebirth through reincarnation. She also highlights the notion that mortality is an integral part of regeneration in the circle of life.

The unique Namibian environment played a marked role in the work of a number of the artists at Tulipamwe, more so after the awe-inspiring trip to Sossusvlei. Eric Pongérard, the sculptor from Réunion, was inspired by the vastness of the land and sky in Namibia. The striated structure of the surrounding mountains as well as the division of the landscape into two by the road running through it made a strong impression on him. This imagery is reflected in his column-like stone installation pieces which have qualities evocative of the work of the renowned British artist, Andy Goldsworthy. Goldsworthy produces art using natural elements found in the environment such as leaves and ice. Unfortunately Pongérard's piece lost some of its appeal when it was moved from its outdoor surroundings and installed at the National Gallery in Windhoek.

The young Namibian painter, Shiya Karuseb, tackled an issue which is increasingly becoming a permanent feature of city life in southern Africa — that of street children. His strong figurative imagery portrays despondent looking youths with no hope for a future; a legacy forced on them by poverty, irresponsible parents and society turning a blind eye.

The intense blue that dominates the canvas conveys an aura of bleakness and anguish — a reflection of the mounting social problems created by homelessness. Two other young Namibian artists who produced interesting work are Nita Ndongo, a sculptor who worked in stone, and Job Jonathan who not only painted but tried his hand at making installation art.

The South African artist, Philisiwe Sibaya, added another dimension to the workshop with her inspirational prints. She enthusiastically shared her knowledge and skill with everyone. After Tulipamwe, she hosted a printmaking workshop for the art students at the John Muafangejo Art Centre in Windhoek.

Painter/sculptor Voti Thebe from Zimbabwe experimented with different media including wood, stone and soft sculpture. He produced a beautiful handpainted fabric as well as an impressive circular minimal wood piece partially stained with colour. Though somewhat different in texture and form, the sculpture had a certain resemblance to a piece by Gerry Dixon I had once seen at Gallery Delta.

Eric Liot, the French artist, produced two sensitively assembled pieces constructed from mixed media. The one artwork, made of rectangular units of wood and metal held together with wire, brought to mind the piece by Marsha Pels, the American artist, mentioned by Stephen Williams and reproduced in *Gallery no 7*. His artworks, like Liot himself, are imbued with a sense of humour.

It is evident from the variety of work produced and the communication channels established during the Tulipamwe Workshop, that art is a universal language capable of crossing cultural barriers and changing attitudes. The visual arts therefore play an important role as a barometer of social change. In light of this, it is our responsibility as southern African artists, black and white, male and female, to constantly challenge ourselves to go beyond portraying safe, conventional imagery by experimenting with new, innovative ways of expressing our vision. We need to create art that is multifarious and enquiring because we are society's conscience.

The benefits of international art workshops such as Tulipamwe are far-reaching. Through workshops a healthy cross-fertilisation of ideas takes place and artists from diverse backgrounds are able to establish links with each other, share techniques and experiences. These regional workshops are of particular value to southern African artists who tend to work in isolation with little stimulus. Tulipamwe is thus an important medium for fostering cultural exchange, understanding and growth in the visual arts of not only Namibia but the southern African region as a whole.

(right) Painting on the plight of street children by Shiya Karuseb (Namibia)

(below) Painting influenced by the trip to the dunes at Sossusvlei by Neo Matome (Botswana)

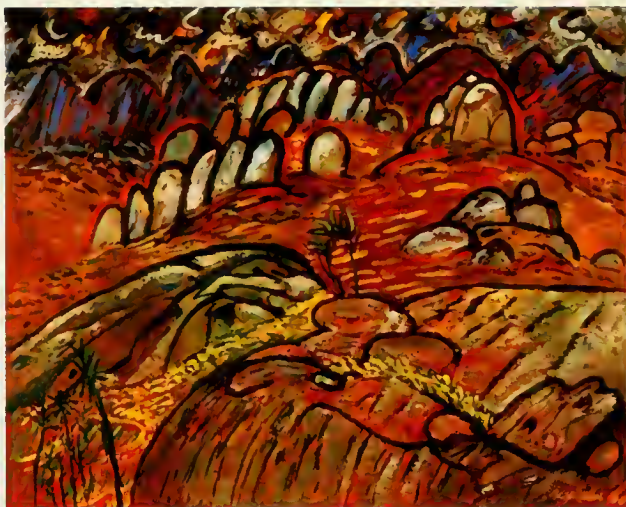


Neo Matome



Neo Matome

Brian Bradshaw, *Vukutu*, 1996,
120 x 150cm, oil on canvas (Photo courtesy
Everard Read Gallery)



Unable to interview
Brian Bradshaw,
painter, ex-Director
of Zimbabwe's
National Gallery and
former Professor of
Art at Rhodes
University,
South Africa,
Gallery sent
some questions.
Brian Bradshaw
writes from
Belmont, UK:

digging deep

Recent work Recently went to N. Namaland. No flowers. No Tourists. Touching S. of Namibia. Wonderful. Very Hot. 39°C. Red Desert. Red Rock. Whoever described Africa as *Darkest!* In fact it is *Brightest*. Vibrates. Absorbs. I move about and get the feel of a place. A whole place and *more* than place. The Red Earth, Bomvu, is more than a colour (as the Himba know). The fire and dust. The Great Earth. The Power that is Nature. Not here the passive tinkle-tinkles of domestic Mediterranean light-and-shade which bred pointillism and Colour Theory playing on Gardens and pink-blue flesh. Here is the heat of Being. Conflict. Strength undiluted. The Great Past enfolding Present. Embracing. Gripping. Hammering a heat which is not for leisure-pleasurers lotion-browning. AFRICA! where Sun bites Earth. Bruises Rock with brutal Force. Pressures without and burns within. Alone, but not alone. Meeting — UNKULUNKULU!

Reflection (momentary) A person — must have been American — visited (I think) southern Africa. Caused quite a stir among ART-CIRCLES (those things 'tis said that the Great Bird disappears up). His name — I think — was Greenberg. He said that Art had taken all it could from Nature! No more left! Nature was dead! What about human nature? Was that dead too? Did he say? Was he dead? — In his case, certainly.

Intentions If I could describe in words, what I paint, why I paint, how I paint, there would be no reason for me to paint. But there is a reason, and a need — and it's in the painting. And the only medium would be OIL — and no artificial substitutes — with colours compounded from Earth — and brushed, swept, punched, stabbed, knived on the resilient surface of canvas. The physicality of Act is important. The shaking off, the being rid of repeat technique — of any technique and thought and art-applied consciousness and the digging deep to what must be sought and, eventually, must be found — before peace is possible — or at least, a rest in the mud. The physical paint — the vehicle — must never go dead — must keep alive. The Nature of Paint — of oil paint — must be used and handled within terms of its character.

Subject, study "*The proper study of mankind is man.*" Or is it — necessarily? Or maybe. Or more appropriately, for man — woman. Naked i.e. Natural and therefore unglamourised. But such attitude amounts to anything. The more alive — which means moving — the better. Posing is for photographs or paintings like photographs. African animals do not pose. They shake off flies. They conceal themselves. They use camouflage. Land, Earth, Sky do not pose. It can be de-natured by viewfinder into scape or scene. It can be Beauty-spotted like Princess Di. It can be processed for industrial purposes. But Nature to qualify unto itself

must be Natural and Free and Wild. With such Nature one may freely mix and be driven and compelled. There is no Time. Everything is Now. Everything is Eternity. Senses are folded by the beat of sun and the roar of silence. I am in company with Earth and Sky. There is no horizon or petty perspective. I am with ALL that needs be and have become Myself and More and as far removed from Science and Technology as possible. I make marks to help explain. Not look-see marks but marks urged by all senses. These will point the way to work with paint involving. Subject? What? There are many things even in one. Woman: Leopard: Baboon : Bird. But *never* cosmetic. And the greatest of all. The World. Earth and Sky. Cosmological. How does one define that — in the Art Calendar? What category? Landscape?! Not really. I'm just a Painter.

Art scene This anywhere is groupism, togetherism in the social sense and scene. Pretentious of course — as are all social scenes. The set and the setting : the atmosphere : the theatrics : the cocktails and the poses-for poseurs and in-the-swing-incorporates. Hollywood style trivialities. “How *are* you Darling — I just *love* that one. Naughty Gerald (he's the critic for the Daily Blab) says the sky is quite wrong for the Transvaal. Could I please have another sherry.”

African art Important to Africa — and the world. Not for museums and Interior Decor. Not for Tourists — who in any case prefer the hectares of Junk especially produced for them. The Real Art is powerful, meaningful and has a strong sense of form containing the presence of Ancestral Spirits and breathed-on by God. It has the essence of Bomvu — the Earth of Life. It is Tribal and Traditional and means much to the People of Africa. Or it did. Depending upon how much the African remains African and doesn't become a replicated junkie from Haarlem or the White House. Thousands of its greatest works were destroyed by Missionaries. European artists in the throes of modernism imitated and made use of African Masks and, according to History, revolutionised Art. Picasso, Braque, Brancusi, Giacometti, Modigliani, Matisse etc. In essence they were mostly interested in the outer form which is unique in itself. Unfortunately much is now trivialised for Trade (but no more so than art anywhere which is plagiarised).

AFRICA Since I have *chosen* to live in Africa more than half my life, I am more African than European. By Africa, I mean Africa — not the quasi-Mediterranean of the Cape, nor the good-life coffee-shops and pizza places. As the world deteriorates (i.e. becomes Americanised) I become progressively more African. I find the natural dignity, good manners and humour of the African more fitted to the character of humanity than the crude, gormless, un-culture followers of the Yankee plan who stalk the cities particularly at weekends! However much things change (and Coca-cola expands), the Land, Continent, Mountains, Bush and Earth of Africa remain as vast, wild and true as ever. Tourist Trails and Safari Treks which follow the New Trade Routes make no more impression on the Giant of Africa than a mosquito on an Elephant. Leisure-pursuit-sports may help destroy Beauty Spots such as Vic Falls, but minor concentration at selected GETAWAY-GETWITHIT sites helps keep most places free of litter. On a recent airlight to Europe I heard a South African tell British Tourists that the KAROO was boring and best avoided. I would be happy if he tells everyone that and helps keep all the best places clear and clean. Poor fellow, he was greatly taken by the absurd quality of Inflight films! I became South African some thirty years ago.

Previous work My previous work has, of course, like life and attitudes gone through different stages and developments. But not enormously — like this week to “Hard Edge” and next to “Kitchen Sink”. Painting has always been a quest. A personal exploration. As simple and direct as is eventually possible. As unsafe, as natural, as uncalculating as needs must be. First, Drawings — and Etchings — and then more and more into Paint. First, Buildings — and then Men (Miners) and Women and Birds and Dogs and Cats. And then Mountains of Wales. And Sea. The rhythm and power of sea waves. Then more and more to Earth. And so, to Africa. But always alone i.e. never encamping with schools and styles.

Artists I particularly admire Ambrogio de Lorenzetti; Paolo Ucello; Hercules Seghers (etchings); Matisse; Géricault; David; De Kooning; Derwent Lees; Old Crome; Vespignani (etchings); Sheila Fell; Pederson; and Cedric Morris, who made his own paint (that great Welsh Cormorant over his fireplace). Artists before the High Renaissance; Ikons; Early Greek (Kourai); Early Greek Pots; Cycladic; Minoan; Etruscan; Early Egyptian; Early Gothic; Early Celtic; Megalithic; Prehistoric (the masterpiece of Lascaux); Bushman Rock Paintings; Tribal and traditional African — Hausa, Himba, Baule, Senufo, Dogon, Bambara, Dan, Yoruba, Fon, Ibo, Shango, Pende, Masai, Makonde, Tuareg, Shona, Zulu.

One of the greatest paintings I know is hidden at the end of a rock passage in Matabeleland. The tunnel so small one needs to wriggle through. The work is near to one's head i.e. close to the ground. About 12 or so inches high. A running hunter/warrior. Patterns of water energy mix with his image. The artist painted him hundreds of years ago in such a place and position for necessary reasons. He will remain so. As intended. With purpose intact. And as far as I am concerned — undiscovered. It is a great work. As art, it is alive. And remains Living Legend.

Art-International

Completely different is Modern Myth massively sponsored for various reasons, like all selective news and propaganda. News Agencies collect news and newspapers select. The Press needs to sell. And the stories are written. Two recent news items almost simultaneously revealed:

1. The electronic bombing and selective shelling of Lebanese civilians in a further invasion of Lebanon. Killing about 160 women and children. Ambulances and UN compounds containing wounded and refugees also targeted. Deliberate destruction of thousands of homes and of roads to prevent any attempted aid and assistance. Such action compares with the Nazi SS practice of wiping out an entire village because a single Nazi had been killed. It was aptly code-named "Grapes of WRATH" and was condemned by all countries *except* the US of A. A UN investigations team concluded the above events were correctly reported. The US of A *warned* the UN team and *threatened* to replace the UN Secretary General.
2. The US of A is pressing for trials of selective war criminals in Bosnia! The Western Press is loath to respond. But the aggressors are sometimes termed victims — and the victims are called aggressors.

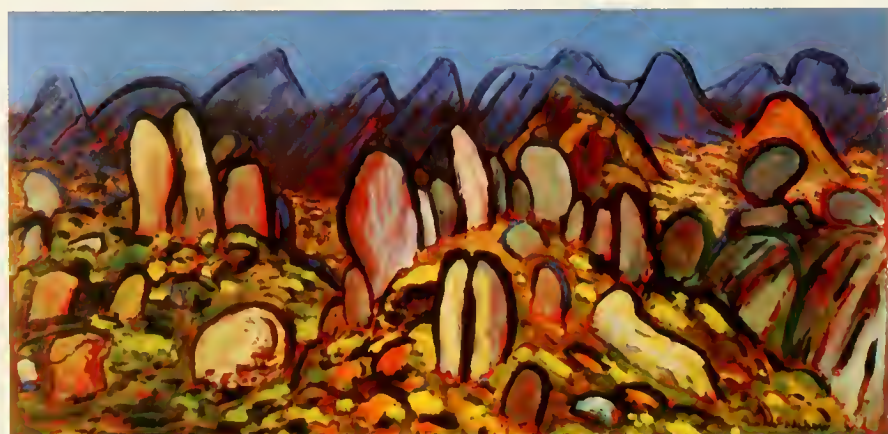
What is to be called Truth? Are we to be concerned with Truth?

As far as war crimes go what about those of the US of A? Was the dropping of the A bomb — and the H bomb — Not a war crime? And the Napalm bombing of the Vietnamese? And the electronic slaughter of 600,000 Iraqis in retreat? How can massacre by technology be called Heroic War? and the General in charge be called 'Hero'? How can US Diplomacy be congratulated? How can US Administration be thanked for supplying further technological weapons of destruction?

It is a terrible thing that one country exerts such singular power. Especially when, in its short history it has reached such depths of decadence. The World's Greatest Democracy — as it is pleased to call itself — is actually a World Dictatorship, for there are many ways of achieving totalitarianism. Is Art the only form of truth left? But not even there — we know by Art-Internationalism that standardisation and deplorable uniformity of approach and new technology have taken over the Art-World as well as everything else. Apart from massacres of the innocent there is destruction of the individual. Everywhere is tuned to the same set of Rules. *Everywhere* begins to look the same. Everybody begins to dress the same — to eat, to drink the same. To behave the same. And Orwell's prophecy is ignored.

Since there are no bite-backs — except for the Somali people who sent the almighty US Marines back into an untelevised sea departure — the World Media is strapped, frozen, bought by Mickey Mouse. There *is* no Real News. No tangible fact is allowed to come clean and forward. People are kept bemused and amused by cellular phones and entertainment and even the dying are assaulted by handshakes from junked-up pop stars or publicity-seeking princesses.

Brian Bradshaw, *Eastern Highlands*, 1996, 60 x 120cm, oil on canvas (Photo courtesy Everard Read Gallery)





Brian Bradshaw,
Red Dwala, 1996,
110 x 140cm,
oil on canvas
(Photo courtesy
Everard Read
Gallery)

So how is truth to be found? Except by the only way that truth can ever be found. Not by computer but by oneself. In Art and by Art one always *has* to reach truth by oneself. There is no other way for anyone to discover anything except by individual effort (which is why the new system places highest priority on elimination of the individual). Prize-winners in all aspects of international (i.e. totalitarian) life are anti-individuals and community Reps — those who cannot reach into themselves nor would not for the sake of comfort and conformity.

It has all happened before, of course. The New World is not *that* original. As Petronius wrote in Nero's time:

"The cause of present decadence when all the finest arts have withered — and painting has left not even a faint track of former excellence behind — is money lust and dominance by usury. In past times the Arts were vigorous and rivalry between men was the wish to discover new things for humanity. Do not be amazed at the breakdown of painting when a lump of gold replaces everything the gods ever wrought."

We should perhaps *expect* to be confronted today with a continuous Cat-walk Parade of Junk Culture. We, perhaps, should not be surprised to see doped-up DADA dragged back into Gallery space — and skateboard contemporary trivia clogging up achievements of the Past and honest efforts of the present.



Brian Bradshaw,
Lowveld, 1996,
71 x 61cm, oil on
canvas (Photo
courtesy Everard
Read Gallery)

Henry Miller was an honest American. He wrote: *"There are barely a half-dozen names in the history of America which have meaning."* Thoreau was one. He escaped to the wood at Walden, away from the false skin of a country which had no depth beyond its unnatural epidermis. He wished to live deliberately and confront only the essential facts of life — *deep with Nature* — to draw the marrow from its bones. To arrive at simplicity of structure and purpose in Solitude. In Space. In Nature — and *by Nature to be wholly involved*. To mix intelligence with Earth, in terms of Earth. To discover anew the great Past ever present.

Walt Whitman said that he characterised American life as mean and vulgar. Everything taught by America was false. Where man was *declared to be Free* he was NOT. His life and work became Factory-systematised and its products like rotting apples had to be quickly consumed or thrown away. We know from experience the influence of this Junk Power. We know the spread of fast Junk food; Junk drink; Junk (award-winning) films; Junk (best-seller) books; Junk Oscars and prizes; Junk politics; Junk criteria — and Junk Art.

We see that the US, having got rid of all vestiges of British Imperialism grabs for itself alternative methods of world occupation — using Peace and Trade and Aid wars to spread its 'special' Culture, Economy and Technology. We see that no policy comes dirtier than 'International' and no attitude more absurd than Political correctness — the mark of Quislings. We find that the Western Press is a tool for the US cause and that Art becomes an International Game. Even 'terrorism' has a double meaning to fit US policy and hide its own multiple war crimes. The Art and Culture of every country should be free-searching and honest. Trade must not be allowed to dictate. The US Dollar must not be Almighty. Good films (mostly French) should not be suppressed in order to show US trash. Video weddings and video games are only some of the effects of the Modern Myth, soft-sold as junk alternatives for Real Culture, Real Art and the search for the Truth.

Advice for young artists

Don't believe everything you see in Gallery Space — or necessarily everything you see. Disneyland is nearer than you think!

Do not imitate. Art is NOT *that* easy. Don't look for Recipes and short cuts. Art is No Game — pretending to be clever. It is hard and fulfilling WORK. It is not divided into Traditional and Contemporary since it is NOT style and Academic Manner. It is *honest* search. Personal, Individual Search.

It is the pursuit of Nature. Including Human Nature and one's own Nature. The Nature of Man. The Nature of earth. The Nature of life.

Art is not sociological science or the Yahoo of social workers. It is not feminist propaganda and fantasy. It is not sexist or political statements. It is not a wired-up machine or a chopped-in-half something. Machine art or science is for machines.

Art is not Cat-walk-Fashion. It is not being so damned clever!

Know thyself. BE Yourself.

Art is the pursuit of a Life Time. There are NO Quick methods. Experience. *Personal* experience is the only Guide.

Repetition is useless.

In its making uncertainty is necessary.

It is Not Cosmetic. Not making pretty pictures.
It must be investigative. Each work requires its own approach.

Don't *think* things in Advance. Don't get hooked-on-formulae.
Don't *think* about the Golden Section. Don't think of A-R-T.
Don't get mixed up with Art Courses and Art Books and Art Circles.
Be yourself and do it yourself.
WORK.

AFRICA

AFRICA is Ancient. It has traditions like the roots of a Giant Tree. It has Great Space; Red enriching soil and clay; wild places and Pure desert and Rocks stamped by Age. In Africa, Nature is supreme. It remains the last Truth of the Old World. A changing world as tried and tested by Nature. Past and Present are always merging. There is more of the Past than there is of momentary present. They need each other to grow. When the last vestiges of the rotten flesh cast by the New World are cleared by the Vultures, the Cycle of life fit for Man, Woman, Beast and Art will continue.

I paint to be deep with Nature. Within Nature. By Nature. To Join. To mix with Earth. Red Earth. Bomvu. In terms of Africa. I don't paint 'landscapes'. I paint AFRICA.

Reviews of recent work

Women Visual Artists' Exhibition 1996, August/September, National Gallery, Harare

The focal point of the Women Visual Artists' exhibition is *Sisters*, a paper cut-out chain of dolls, life-size, pale pink, each with a red smiling mouth and a wavy skirt, hands joined. The chain underlines the sisterhood and inter-relation of all women's lives. The innocence of this first impression is starkly and horrifyingly at variance with the handwritten stories of individual women, many of them still only children, from countries around the world — factual stories of abuse, deprivation, degradation, discrimination and violence. The effect is shocking. *Sisters* is a powerful protest and, significantly, it is the work of a non-Zimbabwean. This society largely ignores and covers over its treatment of women, aided by Zimbabwean women's passive acceptance. Much of the rest of the work on show reveals the breadth of this unassertive attitude.

Sylvia Bews-Wright, the creator of *Sisters*, invited viewers to add their own comments to the blank dolls in her chain, and one contribution from an anonymous "sister from Latin America" went as follows:

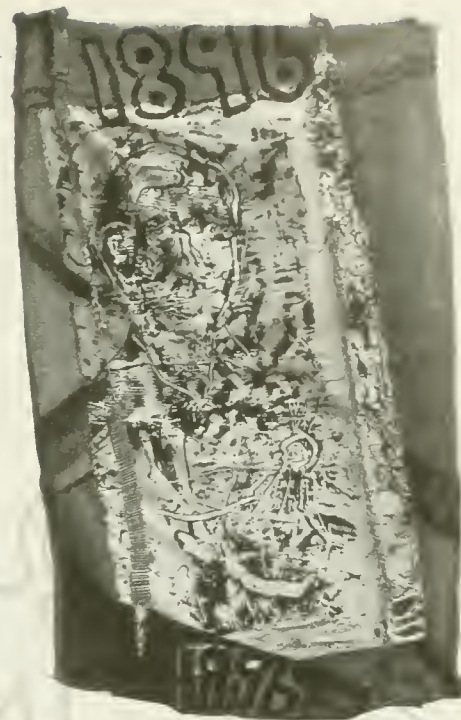
"Women's lives are hard but not this bleak. Women still laugh, dance and tell stories to their children — even in landmine-infested, war torn, dirt —.... countries. Let's put some hope and joy into this gloom."

Yes, let's be 'real' traditional Zimbabwean women and smile, and kneel, and ululate while many of us are being abused!

There are some examples of protest from Zimbabweans on the exhibition but the protest is subtle, masked or often undirected. Tendai Gumbo's *Nehanda* is a successful work in tattered rag on sackcloth — a telling memorial for a heroine of the liberation

struggle; it is the men, the chefs, who vie with one another to get a place in *Heroes' Acre*. Sylvia Bews-Wright's second work on the exhibition, *Chef*, offers us a rendition of one of Zimbabwe's potential 'heroes'.

Amongst the textiles on exhibition is *Violence against Women* produced by the Tashinga Group (women from the Harare Shelter for the Destitute). It depicts, in small embroidered panels, various scenes of domestic abuse. But the viewer has to look



Tendai Gumbo, *Nehanda*

closely to even notice the violence and little appropriate emotion is aroused. The detail illustrated here is the most expressive of the panels. The overall impression of the work is one of cheerfulness, bright zingy colours, delicate stitchery — the visual affect working against the content rather than supporting it.

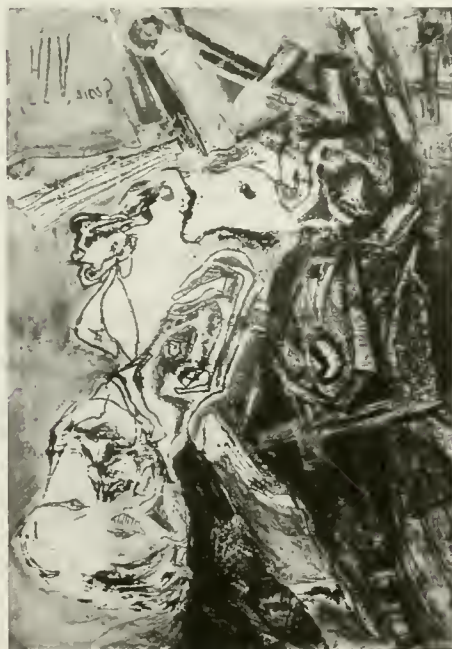
Some categories of this exhibition, particularly sculpture and ceramics, had few submissions. Pip Curling comments in the catalogue, "... the selectors noted that traditional women potters were sadly missing. Pottery is a major craft in Zimbabwe and it is disappointing that rural women have not participated." It was decided therefore not to award prizes for the ceramics category. And, as very few young artists participated, prizes for artists under 25 were redistributed in the open categories. So where are those young female artists' works? Where are the sculptors and traditional potters? Does the concept of exhibiting pottery in a gallery in Harare have any meaning for a potter in the rural areas? Has there been enough information and promotion for this event? There is obviously a need to actively encourage artists to enter this exhibition — a job for the staff of the National Gallery.

There is no doubt though that those who chose to enter represent a wealth of talent within the female artists in Zimbabwe. Lauren Arnott (*Love and Hunger*) and Eichardt Krog (*Lunch Break*) were given awards in the painting section, Tendai Gumbo (*If we had known - Daitaziva*) and Granete Ngirandi (*Voo-Doo*) for their graphics, Abigail Dzingire (*Cultural Design*) and Eunice Saleka (*Life at Home*) in the textile category, and Colleen Madamombe (*First Maternity Dress*) and Virginia



Tashinga Group,
Violence against Women (detail)

Tendai Gumbo,
If We Had Known — Daitaziva





Sylvia Bews-Wright, *Chef*

Ndandarika (*Happy Family*) received awards for their sculptures.

Sibonile Ndlovu's highly recommended lively fabric design *Inkezo Yokumathisa*, with its richness of pattern and colour reminds of works by Hundertwasser. Doris Kampura's five very different entries in the sculpture, painting, and graphics categories, reveal a versatile young artist. *My Inner Landscape* by Anke Bohne, a mixed media collage, uses feathers, pods and bits of rubbish on the shores of a stormy beach to create a moody work. This approach is continued in her *Junk Head* made from metal scraps and other discards of society.

Do women artists necessarily have to produce protest art? Male artists are not decried if they paint landscapes, daily scenes or abstracts. Do women artists want to show their work in an exhibition exclusively for women? Is there an exhibition planned for 'only' men? When does affirmative action become patronising and destructive? One highly esteemed woman artist in Zimbabwe feels strongly that if a work of art is good it will be exhibited regardless of the gender of the artist and that this is what all artists seek. But is the playing field level? Do women artists have to work harder to get work exhibited? Are galleries aware of women's reluctance to put themselves forward, an attitude deeply ingrained by Zimbabwean upbringing? It is a proven fact that women have more difficulty getting education and that a greater proportion of their time is consumed by family and domestic duties on top of regular income-generating work. Is enough being done by art schools and galleries to ensure that women artists get the same encouragement and support as their male counterparts? These are questions for everyone to consider, particularly the National Gallery which is our presumed leader in the visual arts field. If the National Gallery is serious in its intentions, it has some hard work to do, to clarify its aims and to ensure that such a project does not backfire.

Jutta Jackson and Barbara Murray

Barbara Murray

Recordings: A Select Bibliography of Contemporary African, Afro-Caribbean and Asian British Art by Melanie Keen and Elizabeth Ward (London: Institute of International Visual Arts, 1996)

In her Introduction to *Recordings*, Melanie Keen makes a reference which reflects on the book's rather cumbersome title: "From this point on I will use the word 'black' — with a lower case b — to describe people of African, Afro-Caribbean, South East Asian and Asian descent while acknowledging it as a contentious issue and that other expressions may have been used in its place." She might have added, too, that the "British" in the title allows the inclusion of artists — our own Tapfuma Gutsa among them — who have lived there only temporarily.

The book presents a chronology of exhibitions held over the last 25 years, followed by a listing of artists with their exhibition history and related publications, and ends with a bibliography of general texts. All of these will be useful to researchers, historians and those of us with a more than passing interest in the subject, who have neither the time nor the opportunity to trawl the Chelsea College archive on which the book is largely based.

There are the occasional gaps, of course. Naseem Khan's 1976 study, *The Arts Britain Ignores*, although not quite as comprehensive as it was ambitious, should warrant at least a mention. And whilst the book finds room to list Margaret Garlake's *Art Monthly* review of Eddie Chambers, it seems to overlook Chambers' own *The Artpack: A History of Black Artists in Britain* (1988, funded by the Haringay Arts Council), which although limited in its scope, was a well-illustrated introduction to the subject for school children and their teachers.

The main shortcoming of *Recordings*, though, is the one imposed by the elusive and ephemeral nature of the primary documents on which it depends, and the shifting fortunes of the institutions which showed the work. Having worked at London's Africa Centre in the late 70s, I was saddened — but not altogether surprised — to read that it no longer has regular exhibitions of contemporary art. However, when I recall the busy and creative presence of, for instance, Lubaina Himid in the Covent Garden of those years, it surprises me that the entry in *Recordings* contains no reference to her exhibiting prior to 1983.

Importantly, the book does reflect something of a coming-of-age over the decades. The 70s and early 80s were studded with mention of the Africa Centre, the Commission for Racial Equality, The Minority Arts Advisory Service, the Commonwealth Institute and the agencies of the lamented Greater London Council. Today, the ball is properly in the hands of the artists themselves: the indefatigable Chambers, Rasheed Araeen, and the Institute of International Visual Arts for whom Keen and Ward compiled *Recordings*. And safe hands they are, too.

Murray McCartney

**Furniture and Furnishings,
National Gallery in Bulawayo,
August/September 1996**

Why have a boring chair when you can have an extraordinary one? The human spirit thrives on creativity and innovation and this exhibition, the first of its kind for the National Gallery of Zimbabwe, offers us plenty of unusual ideas. Thought up and put together by Stephen Williams, Furniture and Furnishings has stimulated artists and provokes the viewer. The two large galleries in Bulawayo were filled with examples of creativity applied to conventional items: the quirky, the beautiful, the humorous, the poetic and the imaginative — and at the same time useful and functional.

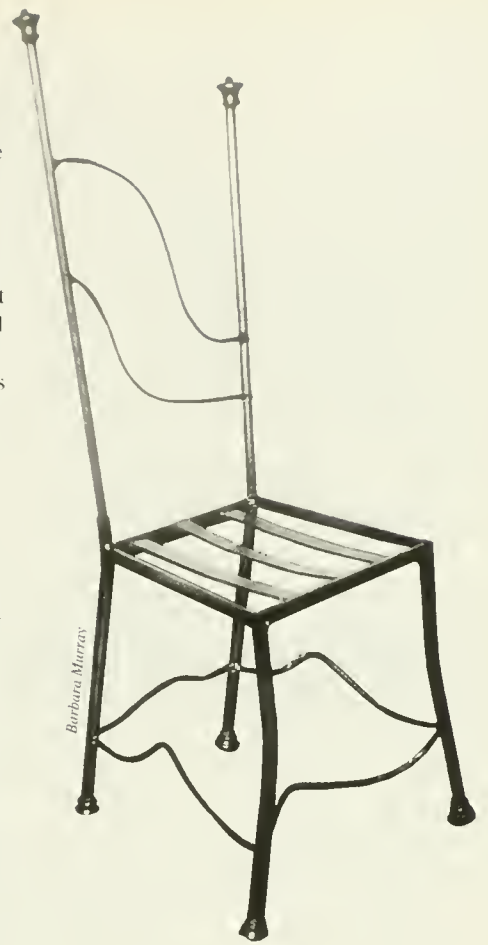
Two chunks of soft-looking chiselled sandstone, girded by carved poles, hold up a warm wood table top. A rough edged slab of pale gleaming marble balances atop a single black pillar. A wire creature about three feet tall bends and strains to keep your door open. Candles flicker in a variety of holders made of curving wood, lumpy clay, slim wire. A table made of dark wooden sleepers and smooth marble with its own miniature cast iron stove — an inspirational place to write or work.

Contemplating the range of objects, perhaps the best way to indicate the individual creativity of the participating artists is to single out one item of furniture: the chair. There were many examples, one being Life Hand Chair by Jeremy Mann in the form of a large hand constructed of thin black lengths of metal bent and curved into the shape of fingers reaching about five feet up from the palm. Depending on the cushion which was unfortunately not completed in time for the exhibition, such a chair could provide a safe, enclosed place to curl up with a book, almost a room of one's own.

Brian Williams, known for his sensitive and lyrical treatment of wood, gives us a *Caveman Chair* composed of multi-hued, softly-sculptured and interlocking pieces. By the same artist is a witty *Hunter's Chair* — a traditional swivel chair with a back support smoothly shaped to resemble buffalo horns. Brian Williams' chairs are always, and surprisingly, wonderfully comfortable.

A tall chair in green metal by sculptor and craftsman, Arthur Azevedo, stands serenely. Quiet and unassuming, with its simple lines and elegant assymetry, it is a pleasure to look at and sit in. By contrast, *Time Chair* by Berry Bickle is a flight of imagination that looks too delicate for human weight. The curving wings and curling frame provide the spirit with a vehicle for travel.

John Knight employs the ordinary, a shovel and garden fork, to create a most unusual *Garden Chair*. I can't vouch for the comfort

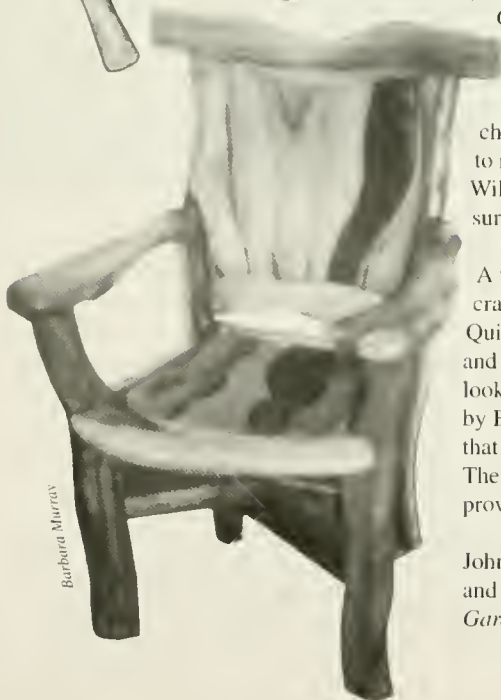
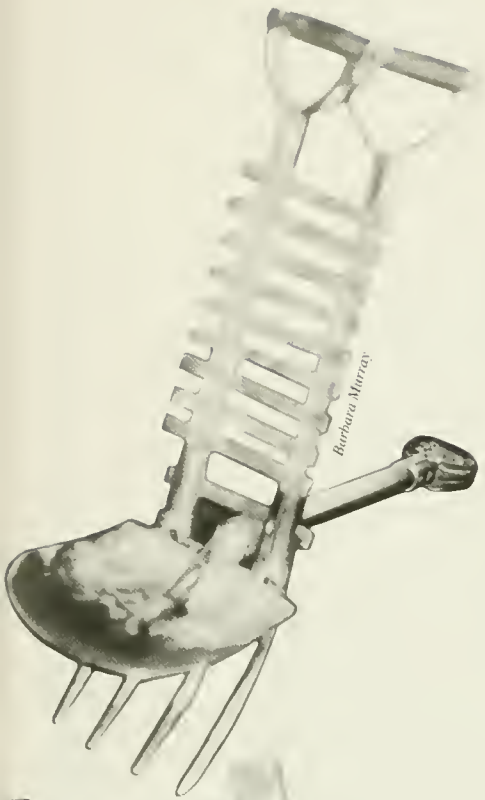


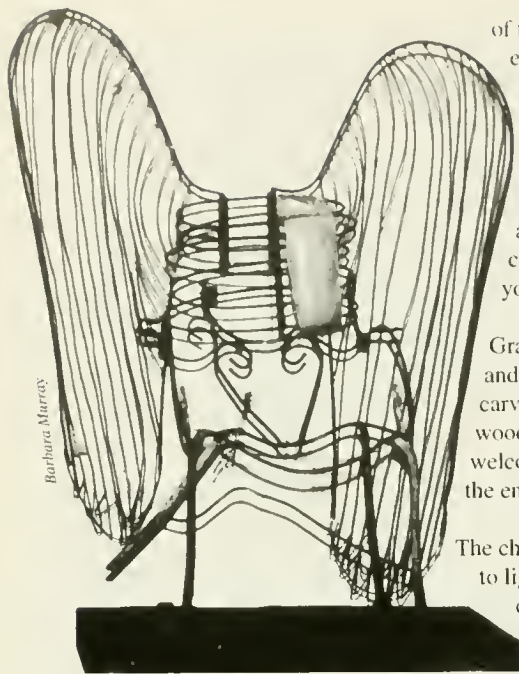
(top right) Arthur Azevedo, *Chair*

(middle left) Gracious Nyoni, *Old Stool*

(bottom left) Brian Williams, *Caveman Chair*

(top left) John Knight, *Garden Chair*





Berry Bickle, *Time Chair*

of this exhibit, not being brave enough to try it! The same artist also exhibited a wild *Light Shower*, made with a length of bright green plastic hosepipe curling up from the floor to end in an aluminium shower rose containing a light bulb above your head.

Gracious Nyoni offers a low and comfortable *Old Stool* carved from a single, chunk of wood — simple, beautiful and welcoming — a restful seat for the end of a long day.

The choice is yours. And perhaps to light your book or conversation a companionable lamp. *Walking in the Light*, a gently humorous creation

in the form of a scarecrow with a straw hat for a lampshade by Ras Ian Knife.

In his introduction to the catalogue, Stephen Williams writes: "Good designers enrich life in a manner that is culturally and environmentally sensitive and make a meaningful contribution to the way people look at and respond to the world ... Good design should excite and stimulate our aesthetic sensibilities ..." One of Stephen's many talents was that of stimulating both the artists and the public. In organising this exhibition, he encouraged individuals, including painters, architects, a 13 year-old schoolgirl, teachers, sculptors, writers and craftspeople, who had perhaps not previously applied their artistic gifts to furniture, and they challenge and reward us with their work. Furniture and Furnishings will be on show in Harare in September/October and it is certainly an exhibition worth seeing. *Barbara Murray*

Fine Arts Students Past and Present, August/September, National Gallery, Harare

Walking up to the exhibition of works by students of the Harare Polytechnic in the east wing of the National Gallery, you cannot help but be captured by Anke Böhne's striking sculptured figure, part of a mixed media installation. Entitled *The Mirror*, the work consists of the figure and a series of textile portraits hung like clothes on a rack. For the figure, Böhne's materials are metal and wire, plied into packed expressiveness through every limb and form of the body in its twisted, turning motion. This structure is covered in stretched stockings in varying neutral tones and hues effectively invoking flesh, ending in a pair of solid knee-high plaster boots firmly planted on the ground. A closer look at the sketchbook in the figure's hand indicates that we perhaps breeze over people in general too fast in life. Written in the sketchbook is the instruction: "If you only have your own 2 HANDS look at the textiles/ the FACES with somebody together! Touch them, turn them over!" Assertive and dominating, this piece seems to suggest a need to try to understand art, to confront and recognise ourselves and others as depicted by artists. Much of the other work does not however ask any questions nor attempt to actively involve the viewer.

A gentler and quieter piece is *Zimbabwe Yorufaro* by Sam Mulabu, composed of entwined wood, metal, wire, mud and hide. The wire is worked into organic shapes, woven spider webs, snail trails and chongololo skeletons, and covered in a layer of sandy mud. The merry figure drawn on one of the wooden verticals uses the natural sculpted hole to achieve a heady lightness. The pale animal hide is turned with the soft inside out, with just a hint of the hairy coat revealed in a fold.

Chrispine Mutsadyanga's *Figure* shows a sound and balanced composition. The figure is weighted on the step-ladder drawn in varying widths of lines and angles using charcoal, graphite and ball point pen. He has worked competently with both the background and subject together.

The ceramic work was a letdown after last year's show when we were stunned by the workings in clay, the confidence with which the medium was handled. The pots this year are of an almost elementary standard. Boring forms, crudely worked and insensitively glazed, which reveal no understanding or enthusiasm for the material. It seems that last year's students were inspired by the work of the visiting Maori potter, Wi Taepa, whose free inventiveness and robust approach to clay was shared in a workshop at the Polytechnic. Every effort should be made to expose students to fresh, creative ideas in this way.



Chrispine Mutsadyanga, *Figure*

forthcoming events and exhibitions

Following on from the exhibition of work by prominent young painters **Luis Meque**, **Richard Witikani** and **George Churu** Gallery Delta will feature recent sculptures by **Gerry Dixon**. On 5 November there will be an unusual show entitled **Explorations** which will present fragments, writings, sketches, paintings and other materials by some prominent artists, giving insight into their processes. Later in November, Delta exhibits paintings and off-the-wall work by **Berry Bickle**.

The National Gallery in Bulawayo will be holding a commemorative **Celebration for Stephen Williams** on his birthday, 17 November. There will be a limited retrospective exhibition of his work drawn from private collections in the Bulawayo region and activities are planned to reflect the multi-faceted approach he took to the promotion of the visual arts. A more complete retrospective is planned for 1997. In October a workshop will be run by visiting British painter **Maryclare Foa** and work by **George Nene** will be shown. November and December will feature the **10th VAAB Annual Exhibition**.

Sandro's at 17 Duthie Avenue will open in early October with a one-person show by **Paul Wade**. Entitled *Balancing Act*, the exhibition will feature among other works a group of 16 painted cubes which invites the viewer to make his or her own 'painting' or 'sculpture' by rearranging the cubes in whatever order or shape appeals. Sixteen cubes offers a possible 2.8 million million combinations on just the frontal plane alone!

From 15 to 30 November Pierre Gallery will be showing an exhibition of sculpture by **Henry Munyaradzi** whose work was selected along with that of 29 other artists for the International Sculpture Biennale in Paris this year. Munyaradzi is the only sculptor from Africa to have been chosen for this prestigious exhibition. Following this in December will be installation work by **Tapfuma Gutsa**.

The National Gallery in Harare will be showing **Furniture and Furnishings** from mid-September to mid-October. The gallery will then close until the opening of the annual **Heritage Exhibition** on a date to be announced in early November.



Anke Bohne, *The Mirror*

Overall the exhibition displayed a good technical knowledge of drawing, painting and printmaking with an understanding of their relative potentials. The painters show strong confident brushwork and good use of colour. What is needed is some experimentation and letting go. *Myrtle Mallis*



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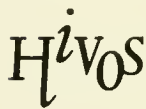
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The art magazine from Gallery Delta

No 10

Sponsoring art for Zimbabwe

Gallery Delta, the publisher and the editor gratefully acknowledge the following sponsors who have contributed to the production of this issue of *Gallery* magazine:



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Cover: Gerry Dixon, *Para Noire* (detail), 1996, 228 x 123 x 22cm,
wood and grass (photo credit: Barbara Murray)

Left: Crispin Matekenya, untitled (detail from Blakiston School
Playground Project) 1996, approx 6 x 2m, wood (photo
credit: Barbara Murray)

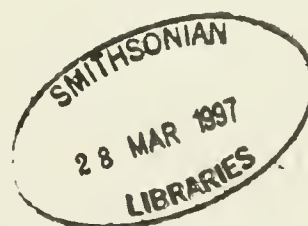
© Gallery Publications

Publisher: Derek Huggins. Editor: Barbara Murray. Design & typesetting:
Myrtle Mallis. Origination: HPP Studios. Printing: A.W. Bardwell & Co.
Paper: Magno from Graphtec Ltd.

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Subscriptions from Gallery Publications, c/o Gallery Delta, 110 Livingstone
Avenue, P.O. Box UA 373 Union Avenue, Harare. Tel: (263-4) 792135
Fax: c/o (263-4) 753186 e-mail: gallery@delta.icon.co.zw



Trying to get to grips with one of the most unaccountable of Zimbabwe's artists, *Gallery* asked Murray McCartney to engage Gerry Dixon in conversation. The artist has added his own comments.

Gerry Dixon



"Nineteen sixty-two, sixty-three, on a diet of Retsina and slimming pills, Bob an' I doin' a street cabaret in Athens, him on his mouth-organ, me playing on my pith helmet – bam! bam! bam! But Bob had to go. I mean, there we are, flat broke, and he's using his last coins to buy an ice-cream. An ice-cream!"

Gerry Dixon's acid indignation isn't something you'd like to meet on a dark night. But the lightness of touch is never far behind: *"The next week, I'm in Beograd, and what's playin' on the juke-box? Cliff Richard! And all these people thinking that they're rebels!"*

Which leads, in our roller-coaster conversation, to considerations of communism, recollections — and they are legion — of his antipathy to it. *"I've been anti- since my father and all his trade unionism; sightless leaders, boring contrrollers of life ..."*

Outer sight

Dixon is 58 now, and looking a lot fitter than anyone should look after a history of making the 'free life' pretty much an article of his existence. Those who would control it are either vanquished, pilloried, abandoned, or given a wide berth against the day when his gentle wrath will light on just the tool to do the job: a word, a look, a sculpture.

To suggest, though, as one Harare critic has done, that this makes him the Don Quixote of the contemporary art scene, is to miss two important points. His ideals may be quite as lofty as those of Cervantes' good knight, but the villains of his piece are real enough. Well, some of them are, at least: poisonous vehicle emissions; nuclear weaponry; the squander-mongery of space exploration; the media manipulation of sound frequencies and visual images. Others perhaps owe more to the fertility of his imagination than the rigour of his analysis.

edged history. *"There goes Gerry Dixon,"* they seem to imply, *"characteristic flap-eared cap making him look for all the world like Snoopy mocking the Red Baron."* The endearing hermit. The iconoclast with a soft centre.

The soft centre had other beginnings. The west London district of Southall — beyond the reach of the Underground which hives off north and south of it, tracking more prosperous realms — had a particular character in 1938. The arrow-straight streets, fanning off The Broadway like fish bones, were surrounded by airports, and factories, and RAF bases. Not only industrial, but military-industrial as well, a strategic target. And a for lad in wartime Southall, the sirens and air-raids and dashing-for-the-shelters went with the turf.

"I grew up in surroundings of fear," Dixon recalls, *"but it was more like I was watching it. I went round collecting bits of bombs, and shrapnel, and put them in little boxes. The oldies were freaking out, but I don't actually remember any fear."*

Family life was strained, and fractured. Mother was hospitalised, sister was sent to an orphanage, and Dixon himself to live with his grandmother until his father remarried when he was twelve.

"I fought everything. Changed schools a lot. Lived on the streets. Nineteen fifty-two, in comes TV. Most people putting up aerials, even if they didn't have a set — keeping up with the Joneses. I lost my old man to the BBC, and I've avoided television all my life. Before TV everyone was on the streets in London; then — overnight — nothing. Police began appearing in the evenings: 'Shouldn't you be indoors, Sonny?'"

London was the biggest city in the world: something was going down then. We had a strict hierarchy on the streets, in-built policing. Then comes TV, aggression, negative newspaper reporting, boys being pulled off the street. Nineteen fifty-five, a friend gets beaten by the police with a baseball bat for no offence. A baseball bat

... we didn't even know what baseball was."

At 16, he started an apprenticeship with the engineering firm, AEC. *"My main thing was to avoid compulsory two year's army conscription, and you could plead deferment by studying. I did day-release, and passed enough engineering exams to miss the army."* Characteristically, he glosses over the skills he learned; it's unlikely that his laddish attitude and irreverent time-keeping detracted much from his design and drafting capabilities.

Away from the factory, life was a cocktail of billiard-halls, dog-racing at Wembley twice a week and jazz clubs. *"I was an 'outer'. If you're an outer, you're not into the general movie. The suburban outers individually went to city centre; we were into music."*


Chasing the 'Trane

The hard-bop of modern jazz might have been scripted for Gerry Dixon and his outer pals. Listen to Thelonius Monk: *"I say, play your own way. Don't play what the public wants. You play what you want and let the public pick up what you are doing — even if it does take them 15, 20 years."*

Or Nat Hentoff, on Coltrane: *"The deadly serious John Coltrane, groping for as many possibilities as he can think of and combine in each chord that rushes by, performs with a hugely emotional 'cry' of desire that has been at the centre of jazz since the first field hollers."*

Meanwhile, back at the factory, Dixon was stirring the corporate feathers with his views — not positive — on the volumes of carbon monoxide that AEC vehicles were going to pump into the atmosphere with their new line of London buses. The technical director had his own opinion: *"Dixon, I think you'd better go and work somewhere else."*

The somewhere else was Australia, a long way from England's stifling 'dumb'. *"Melbourne. Height of Australian*



Gerry Dixon, *Para Noire* (detail of the event), 1996,
228 x 123 x 22cm, wood and grass

on site

unemployment. My dress was out of order. Every job interview, I blew their minds." But the country occasionally returned the favour, by blowing his, lacing a succession of rough-neck adventures in deserts and swamps with interludes of insight.

"I met a kid who'd never, at 12 years old, seen anyone else except his father. Presence? One hundred per cent! Changed my attitude to city life forever."

"I got into collecting bones. Painting them bright colours. Stringing them up around the place."

1962. The last three months of a long and chequered two-year stay were spent, following a bout of agoraphobia, in a Brisbane flat. *"I was there three months, and didn't go out once. Started oil painting. I'd phone for a taxi and tell the driver what paints to buy, and he'd bring them round. Paranoia No 1 — that was a great painting. The rest I burned."*

Time to move on. The boat to India, and the dope-fuelled trek west, years ahead of the crowd: magic stories shining like jewels in a compost of sickness and squalor.

Back in London, Dixon lived in an old ambulance, and listened to John Coltrane until his money ran out. *"I was wrecked. Gone. Derelict."*

"A friend pulled out an ad in the Evening Standard: Emigrate to South Africa. Christmas Eve I go to the office to apply, and New Year's Day I'm there."

A crow in the crow's nest

"Arriving in South Africa ... it's like being in Britain with a PhD and a thousand pounds a month — just for being white!"

"I go to Jo'burg, because it's inland. I like inland. Got a job straightaway: design engineer with Leyland. Then moved into advertising. Maintaining an artist's attitude."

Johannesburg gave way to Cape Town; advertising gave way to music. Dixon the autodidact, who a few years previously had arranged for a librarian to mail him books at regular intervals during an eight month sojourn as a labourer in the Australian desert, now explored minimalist music. It was fertile ground for his creative avidity.

David Toop wrote in his recent book, *Ocean of Sound*: *"In the latter half of the 1960s, reciprocal motion agitated and enlivened music. Miles Davis, Sly Stone, Santana, Cream, La Monte Young, Jimmy Hendrix and Terry Riley all indulged in marathon trance grooves, rippling with strange currents, often stretching beyond the limits of*

endurance into boredom, but hunting ecstatic release through repetition."

In the Cape, Gerry Dixon began creating sound composites which he described as "a cross between the quality of Bushman drones and Zen Buddhist chants ...", it was a short step to giving weekly 'concerts' of single sine-wave music on his frequency generator.

And it was during this time, when his mind was focused on the transformative power of music, that he had his synaptic encounter with the mind of Joseph Beuys. "His Fat Chair? It altered my mind! Artist of the century!"

Today — one monster Cape Town nightclub, one move to Zimbabwe, and one nervous breakdown later — Dixon's regard for the shaman of post-war Germany remains undimmed.

Beuys himself was uneasy about the shamanistic pigeon-hole to which he was often assigned, and once said, "I accept it only in the sense that I don't use shamanism to refer to death, but vice versa — through shamanism I refer to the fatal character of the times we live in. But at the same time I also point out that the fatal character of the present can be overcome in the future. The future, to my way of thinking, is the dimension that contains the point where everything begins."

Gerry Dixon is no stranger to "the fatal character of the times we live in"; his familiarity began in childhood and never looked back. Nor is he out of tune with Beuys' ontology ...

Beuys: "...there are no such things as unshakeable principles, everything is alive and in flux. ... the only unshakeable principle I can think of would be something that is flexible to the nth degree, something that is continually changing."

Dixon: "Maybe ... I go with the 'maybe's ... I don't let doubts get in the way."

What has all of this got to do with art? Not a lot, according to Beuys, who once claimed that; "I really don't have anything to do with art — and that is the only way to really contribute anything to art. I've always wanted to get away from this conception of the artist — one who makes drawings just to be making drawings — because I don't want to be that."

But the impulse is there, and one can imagine Dixon nodding his head in agreement as Beuys continues: "... it's an impulse that is no different from human impulses in general. How does someone get interested in agriculture? I suppose certain experiences are important, as in any other field. In the creative field, though, what you always seem to find is some sort of intention that reaches out for some basic problem in human life, which then becomes a field of activity. With me, it's that certain questions — about life, about art, about science — interest me, and I feel I can go farthest toward answering them by trying to develop a language on paper, a language to stimulate more searching discussion — more than just what our present civilization represents in terms of scientific method, artistic method, or thought in general. I try to go beyond these things ..."

How unhealthy can you get?

In the dusty yard beside his window-less house, Gerry Dixon lugs over *The Marine from Marondera*, a wooden figure shaped like an inverted tear-drop, and slots it, spike-down, into the tree slice which forms its base. The Marine looks as if he would be happier driven straight into the hard brown earth, the more to regain his roots and exaggerate his already phenomenal unlikeliness, but portability is the watchword, two days before he and his fellows are relocated to Gallery Delta for an exhibition.

Dixon's house isn't actually window-less, merely glass-less. "All my work is for money," he remarks, walking through — literally through — the French windows, but the tone is less than convincing. Do I realise, he asks, how much the American people will spend on medical aid this year, and goes on to give the answer without waiting for a reply. He speaks in capital letters. THREE POINT FIVE TRILLION US DOLLARS. This, I'm told, shakes down to the equivalent of ten thousand



Gerry Dixon



Barbara Murray

(top) Gerry Dixon, *The Marine from Marondera*, 1996, 106 x 40 x 46cm, wood

(above) Gerry Dixon, *Hot Seat*, 1996, 42 x 108 x 42cm, wood

(left) Gerry Dixon, *Ends Meet*, 1996, 138 x 104 x 34cm, wood

(opposite) Gerry Dixon, *Timeless*, 1996, 179 x 62 x 34cm, wood



Gerry Dixon

Zimbabwe dollars a month for every man, woman and child in the United States. "How unhealthy can you get?"

It's hard to regain a quotidian focus in the face of such astronomic arithmetic, and under the arch-browed, cryptic gaze of *The Marine from Marondera*. Who needs windows in this weather, anyway?

There's a raised stone platform on the land behind Dixon's house, nestling inside a cluster of granite boulders like a meditation zone. He slept there for several weeks while building the core of his new home (who needs walls, either, for that matter?). Lying beneath the stars, his mind was probably snagged more than once by the intrusive knowledge of what else was kicking around up there in the stratosphere. Dixon doesn't — doesn't dare, probably — spin off the annual costs of space exploration, but the very thought of zillions being spent on a "fruitless search for the meaning of life" is a particularly chilling one to him. Not for the first time, his sculptural ire and irony turns on NASA.

A previous response to the mis-spent zillions, exhibited last year, was burdened down with the cumbersome title of *One for NASA* (*National Aeronautics and Space Administration — where the earth is seen as a space station*) *STOP! (For 100 years). Ends Meet* hits its target with a deal more elegance. Through an abstracted, arced, priapic rocket, an angled wooden spike is driven sideways. The fit is cabinet-maker-perfect; the tension between the crystal-sharp spike and the fat, lazy, plum-coloured projectile with its cocky little NASA logo, lingers like one of Dixon's amplified sine-waves.

Will it slice even one day off the duration of the space race? It doesn't matter. This is not agit-prop, not adolescent defiance, not the work of an inky-fingered ban-the-bomb artist. This is irony meeting its ironist: once the spike is put in place, the sculpture's work is done.

By chance, Dixon lets slip during the exhibition that, yes, after all, he probably has done his bit in terms of pointing up the more excessive follies of the post-industrial world; that maybe it's time to move on. But ... but he's an artist, not a strategist, and it would be a foolish punter who'd bet a cent on a Dixon 'maybe'.

NASA and Medicare aside, his canon remains a refuge for serendipity: wood and stone talk to him still, as they ever did. This conversation with his materials both reflects and determines the geography of his life. Even when the windows are glazed, the inside of Dixon's house will never be far from the outside; and even when the sky is out of sight, as he sets another pot of coffee on the kitchen stove, the tree from which the counter is hewn continues to breathe life.

In the past, his material has spoken to him in the tongues of monsters and wild beasts. Lions have emerged from his suburban undergrowth; leopards have grown out of tree-stumps; elephants, even, have visited him and declared, "You're doing fine!"

Either the muse of the ark has left him, or the imperatives of home-making are exerting an uncharacteristic sway; for this latest exhibition he has conjured up two remarkable pieces of sculpted furniture.

Hot Seat is chance at its best. One can imagine the artist squatting down on this random log during a break from labouring in his yard. Something disturbs his rest — an idea? a bird's song? a chord breaking from the loudspeaker? — and the moment has to be immortalised: a saddle is seared into the timber where his bum sat, and twin markers score the position of his legs.

A more elegant and resolved tree-transformation is the lofty scarlet-timbered throne, *Timeless*. The dominant colour itself is unnaturally Dixon-brush, but is redeemed by the delicate threads of yellow bleeding down the natural cracks in the wood. And any thoughts



Barbara Murray



that even this specimen is a trifle echt-utilitarian for the outer from Southall, are dismissed by the whimsy of a giant finger sliding up the side of the chair-back.

And for those with money to burn, there was *Para Noire*, a thatch-haired scarecrow standing sentinel in the gallery garden on opening night. As dusk fell on the ceremony, Dixon torched the scarecrow's hair and art combined with drama. Half an hour later, when the guests had turned their attention away from the mask-face, now sporting a halo of black, feathery curls, drama gave way to magic as the face spontaneously ignited and threw flames out of its mouth and eye-holes. What was that about "*All my work is for money*"?

Two last words on the excessive follies of the post-industrial world: *Fish Report*. Exiled to the garden, in all its pink and silver grotesquery, this work wasn't allowed to sully the gracious interior of Gallery Delta, and even some of the artist's most ardent fans gave it a brisk and derisive thumbs down.

Dixon's response, for all that he affects to care little what people think of him, or his art, was almost visibly pained. "*But it's a fish*," he explained, bewildered that any explanation might be necessary, "*and it's choking. On pollution ...*"

How unhealthy can we get?

Gerry Dixon, *Message from Jupiter*, 1996, 70 x 43 x 18cm, wood

Artist's notes

Part one: It was a cold wet hot dry summer winter's day when Murray came to interview me. It was with some interest that I read his article concerning me: artist. Murray being well-versed in modern trends seemed the ideal writer. Maybe I am too before and after for even such a bright mind so I'm down to writing a bit on myself to compliment Murray's article. Follows my pea-ramble:

From his conveyed vision I feel like a 'done the drug scene'. Right? Wrong! And lots of 70s idiom thought leaves me feeling like a southern African version of David Toop (I couldn't think of anything worse — right now that is). David Toop is Britain's esteeming self interest still making up its own version — like knighting Cliff Richard and not mentioning Cyril Davies. Boring, oh so boring. I left and left again to escape this snippy collage London media invents of its firsts with firsts. Nevertheless it's that which only puts its money into these interpretations and they probably will look a bunch of tosspots forever as the 20th century thins into the soup.

In standing against the blistering insistent wind of the past and never indulging in paddling the river to make it run where it will surely run, I feel my sinews twang in complaint. I will not give approval to the hypocritical fay blindness of the 'I want to be in the middle of shampoo ads'.

Rattling on is the boniest position left for such a spit on two wheels. It's a small fact of human reality that if you seek you will find BUT the information overload of the sinking century leaves floundering cripples, haddock to haddock, many having lost the sole that seeks.

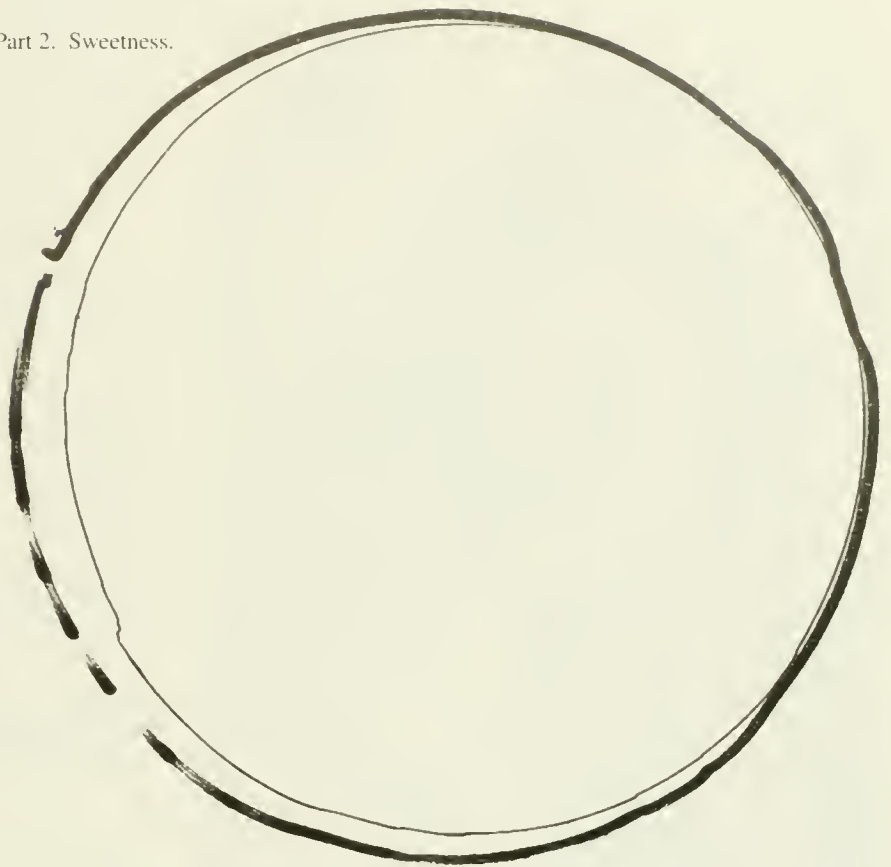
Nevertheless it was deemed domed and dahlias get greenfly so not to worry, god is definitely round the next bend. TV was good at getting the world channelled though highly focused on the benefits of having FREE CHOICE IN A DEMOCRATIC SOCIETY. Which briefly means: If you buy one of the more than 5000 varieties of shampoo now available we will use a small portion of that money to sponsor the next show dedicated to convincing you that our interests are more in your interest than the likes of nasty unscrupulous despots like Gerry Dixon. "Who the hell does he think he is anyway!" Certainly not that person!

Rare chances at literary exposure give my persona its quick burst of buck up ammo to de-tensify its disposition. This is only the second time in 40 years past that a possible risk of exposure has been offered. So I vent on. In-vent-on. Invention. Intervention — in lemmingsville. Unbeknown to all is the fact that I, what is called, *love* life and all that fills it. Though not that which seeks to depopulate it or pigeon-hole it, like

university for one, and certain systems.

As for art — this is art. It's allowing thought waves a wig stretch at a canter. Doesn't do any harm and a bit like curing biltong or smoking kippers.

Part 2. Sweetness.



look
the moon
shines so bright

Part 3. Suggestions as to good manners and a prayer that the padlock controllers are quicker to see they're locked in an air-tight compartment with slowly rising poisonous substances and slowly reducing life support items like fresh air and water. Dredging companies working the estuaries of Europe's largest rivers are faced with the astronomical problem of what to do with the mud dredged up. It is so toxic it has to be disposed of same as radio active waste. And these waters are running continuously into our oceans.

So, as we here in Africa have been labelled 3rd World (as in 3rd class), we could if we were nimble over the next 20 - 50 years alter the concept to World MKIII version, by not following the filthy tracks of the World MKI. As the obsession locally is following the filthy tracks in as apparent an orderly fashion as possible we may not lead the world in any way. But thankfully we are able to BE with some sweetness in this de-tensified part of the human jungle.

Question: Why is it a person like me, who is busting with go and viable life support economic ideas, why am I never given access to finance (or even a telephone)? Answer: I don't know the right people. I wasn't born to the right family. I am honest and speak my mind.

Whatever; it's tedious. So kids. It's not what you know. It's who you know. And just about all the world's problems come under one concept: Culture's coming to terms with MODERN. Over & out.

Gerry Dixon
October 96

Most of us assume that people in a society share a similar conception of reality. Art, however, can reveal just how different individual understanding of experience is.

Ishmael Wilfred: Painting the spirits

Ishmael Wilfred,
Man and the Cannibal,
1996, 80 x 59cm,
PVA on paper



On casual acquaintance, Ishmael Wilfred is a young Zimbabwean who is 27 years old, living and working in Harare with his wife and one year old baby. The son of Malawian parents, his father, a cook on the Watson's farm in Banket, Wilfred grew up in a common Zimbabwean situation and went to the local school. The farmer's wife did painting and decorated bowls and table mats, and there were paintings on the walls of the farmhouse. Young Wilfred became interested in drawing and began to copy pictures and advertisements from magazines and newspapers. Mrs Watson encouraged this, giving him paper, pencils and paints.

On leaving school after passing 'O' level, Wilfred decided that he wanted to be an artist. However his father strongly disapproved as he thought that a man could not earn a living as a painter. He persuaded Wilfred to work as a builder's mate on the farm, mixing cement and carrying bricks. Not willing to give in so easily, Wilfred searched through the telephone directory and began writing letters to various galleries in Harare. A few replies came back, all negative. At last an answer came from the National Gallery saying that they had an art

school and that Wilfred could enrol. So in 1989, he began painting, drawing and printmaking at the BAT Workshop under the tutelage of Martin van der Spuy, Kate Raath, Paul Wade and Phibion Kangai. He completed three years, doing mostly figure studies, landscapes and street scenes. After leaving the BAT, Wilfred got a job doing sign-writing for a store in Harare but with the onset of ESAP, jobs were cut and he found himself without work.

Wilfred had all the while continued his own painting and printmaking, exhibiting at Gallery Delta on the annual Students' and Young Artists' show each year and sometimes having work accepted for Delta's yearly graphics exhibition. He was one of a group of young painters who were working consistently but who had not yet found their own individual voices. It was tough going and sales were few. To add to his difficulties during this time, a cancerous tumour began to grow in his jaw and he had to undergo several operations. The harshness of life sent him searching for reasons and he found himself turning to African spiritual explanations in which he could believe.

In 1995 Ishmael Wilfred brought some paintings, mostly rural scenes and cityscapes but including two very small monoprints, to show Derek Huggins at Gallery Delta. Despite their size, the two monoprints were strong, different from any of his previous work in content. On questioning the artist about them, a deep belief in the spirit world of African culture was uncovered. Knowing Wilfred's ability with paint and brush, Derek Huggins suggested that he should explore these beliefs but in paint rather than print and using a larger format. This was a turning point for Wilfred who had been reticent about expressing such private subject matter except in very small format. The works began to pour out of him developing in content and execution and resulting in the 20 paintings selected for a recent three-person exhibition entitled *Man, Myth and Movement* at Gallery Delta.

In order to understand the ideas expressed in Wilfred's work we need to go back to a point of crisis in his life. *"I had a dream. It was something that I could not understand. There is a person, sleeping, dreaming all these things around him, bad spirits around him, something that is going to happen. We*

don't have the magic to see what is really happening. In the dream, a tooth came out and there was a white thing growing inside. A dream that something was going to happen to me. I dreamed people came to me and I had to eat rotten flesh. In the morning I was not hungry. I was 25. I started getting sick."

Frightened and bewildered, it was only later that he realised that the nightmare was a portent of the tumour which began to form in his jaw. At first the tumour was not painful but "*it would breed at night*", steadily increasing in size. Eventually Wilfred went to the local clinic where he was referred to Parirenyatwa Hospital in Harare. A doctor, without explaining that it was cancer, told him he should have the growth cut out. The operations that followed removed the lower jaw and cut into Wilfred's lip making talking and eating extremely difficult. Each time, the doctors told him the growth was completely removed, but it would grow again and he would have to return to hospital. The inner turmoil in which Wilfred found himself forced him to question life and fate: why such a thing should happen. He turned to his grandparents and to books on African culture and there he found many explanations for the course of his life. At last, just prior to his fourth operation, Wilfred consulted a witchdoctor who gave him some medicine to protect him from witches. He has been in remission since that operation.

Ismael Wilfred is an artist who lives in a world profoundly affected by spirits, where the envy and hatred people feel for one another take on living forms with dire consequences in day-to-day reality. Evil spirits (witches) work on people, causing them harm, sickness and sometimes death. The power of these spirits is great. Their witchcraft works in strange and non-understandable ways but it is effective — as Wilfred says "*it works like remote control*".

Through his paintings, Wilfred has found a channel for expressing these manifestations of evil and the ways they work. It is not a defined world but one in which spirits become visible through animal or human form; a world in which energies, phenomena, incarnations and auras occur. The colours used evoke an African spirit world, bright and strong yet ambiguous, flesh and yet not-flesh, creating a powerful impression of a personal view of reality. The paintings are dominated by reds (danger, blood, raw flesh), blacks (darkness, evil, the unknown, the feared, the night), greens and yellows (auras, lights, rotting flesh, the unnatural); some forms waver and meld, others aggressively attack, loom or threaten; the areas or lines of distinction between one form or image and another suggest possession, unnatural proximities and uncertain boundaries.

Sitting on Doctored Corpses is a small predominantly green painting in which a hunched figure, intent on its business, glares round, with burning red holes for eyes, at the viewer. The work depicts an evil spirit come to claim a body from its grave. Wilfred explains that when a person dies by witchcraft, the people responsible for the death come back to dig the body out for use. But if the family have put some medicine from a witchdoctor on the body to keep it safe, the killer sticks to the body in the grave and cannot move. Then the family can see that these are the people who killed their relative.

At the Mountainside and *Man and Cannibal* reveal another aspect of the African spirit world. Cannibals are the embodiment of evil. They wait in remote places for people to devour, often women looking for wood or small children hunting. If cannibals chase and grab a child, they take it to their hut and keep it quiet with medicine (so that the child does not cry or feel hungry) for several days before they eat it. Cannibals live everywhere, in the countryside and in town. "*Cannibals are evil spirits who take a human body and do evil. They have no mercy. You can just feel that this person is strange, has got something. You can see in the way they talk, the way they look. When you are asleep they come. Red means something dangerous. The eyes of those people, you cannot look at them. He is sort of an animal, sort of a person, you cannot understand how.*"

Two paintings, *Rising Spirits* and *Ghost Appears* show dead people coming back to life in the form of spirits. In African belief, all dead people can return as spirits. They can help and protect their families. "*Some spirits can lead you to a better life.*" But more often the spirit returns to haunt a family member who has not done his or her duty, or who is not living a good life. "*The evil spirits were evil before they died and they come back to frighten people who did harm to them during life, or their children or grandchildren.*" People go to the grave and pray, make offerings and live well in order to keep their ancestors' spirits content. *Ghost Appears* shows "*a spirit of a father or mother who is angry that the child didn't do well so it comes back to frighten people to do what they ought to do. The cross is just the sign of the graveyard. I am a Christian but the spirits come and go and do what they want anyway. If you have an evil spirit, the ghost can hurt you. If you have no evil spirit in you then the ghost will just pass through. The ghost can beat you up if you are evil. If you pass through a graveyard at night you can see a light coming out.*"

Hammerkop Bird is a "*bird that can see the future, how a person's future is going to be. The figure is a skeleton. If the hammerkop sees a person alive who is going to die soon, it will go to the home of that person and it*

will whistle three times and they know they will die soon. To Africans, a hammerkop is not good. Like a vulture. In African beliefs, if you see a vulture something bad will happen. I have only seen a hammerkop in pictures. If you see one something will happen in your family, in African families. The witchdoctor will use a hammerkop to see people's future."

In his painting *The Love Snake*, Wilfred describes his vision of one of the common charms used in African society. Witchdoctors have many charms and medicines that can help a person with everyday problems in their social lives, careers, family situations and their health. These are similar to the number 13, the four-leaved clover or rabbit's foot, herbal drinks — the lucky or unlucky charms of European myth. "*Even at work people use charms. If someone wants to take someone's job then they use charms and the person can vanish or be sick. This happens.*" The love snake is a particularly potent charm used by women to entice men. "*Every man who passes cannot go without talking to her. No matter how old or ugly the woman is, the men will go with her, even young men. The prostitutes use a love snake to get rich. It happens.*" A visit to Mbare market where, amongst the mundane vegetables, tobacco, clothes and tools, stallholders offer herbs, necklaces of bones, skins, skulls and other parts of various animals, and other medicines, confirms the commonplace use of these charms.

Head on Landscape is Wilfred's impression of the scene after a witchcraft killing. "*When a person gets killed by evil spirits he gets his head cut off and it is just left on the landscape. The body has been carried away to be used.*" On being asked whether the pale yellowish head is that of a European, Wilfred says it is not. It is an African head. The colour has been used to create the atmosphere rather than approximate reality. Europeans are outside this realm. Like most religious beliefs, this interpretation of reality is only visible to those whose awareness is awakened. And apropos this painting, a newsclip in today's *Herald* tells how a man, arrested in possession of a human head, led police to several 'graves' containing dismembered parts of bodies.

A notable feature of most of Wilfred's work is the absence of violence. It is not the violent act but rather the fear surrounding the object or event that spills into the painting. For this reason some works might seem unusual but pleasant to a viewer who does not encompass the artist's vision of reality. *Riding* is one such painting showing two human figures on what appears to be a bicycle travelling through a bright yellow background. "*Two spirits are riding, you may see them as if they are riding on a bicycle but they are not on a bicycle, you don't know what you see. These are evil*

spirits riding through the night. Old people. This happens. People can ride. We don't have the magic to see what is really happening. You see things and it makes you feel it is evil but you don't understand. It is evil spirits around. It is hatred around people."

A series of paintings depicts the various animals used by witches to carry out their evil work. *The Hyena* is one animal often used in witchcraft. *"In African belief, if you see a hyena, you run away from the place. You don't see hyena often. They use the hyena to ride on. They become one when they ride together. They ride on you too but you are not sure, you think you may be dreaming, but he has come to you in the form of a spirit. When you wake up you feel something has happened."* The figure behind the red hyena is *"the spirit, the owner of the hyena."* Red has been used to indicate danger, the unusual, a creature to be feared. This colour is used again in *The Red Horse*: Here the animal is trapped, it has been caught by witchcraft. *"They have caught it so they can ride on it, it is a horse but not a horse. In African culture when you see something you have not seen before, a red horse, then you know it is something strange, some witchcraft is happening."*

In *Black Head, Red Horse* again we are shown the witch, the owner, the evil spirit that looks like a person, and the horse. The background is the land. The horse is flying. The circles around the head and horse indicate magic objects tied on.

In *The Battle* with its frenetic swirls of reds and dark blues, Wilfred paints his impression of evil spirits fighting each other. *"People trying to get their rights, people fighting, to be a leader, they just fight even though it is something you cannot fight for. You see people of the same religion fighting. Instead of talking together they are fighting. Evil fighting evil. They are even animals, birds, just fighting."* It is a world beyond control, one which a person must accept and try to avoid if possible.

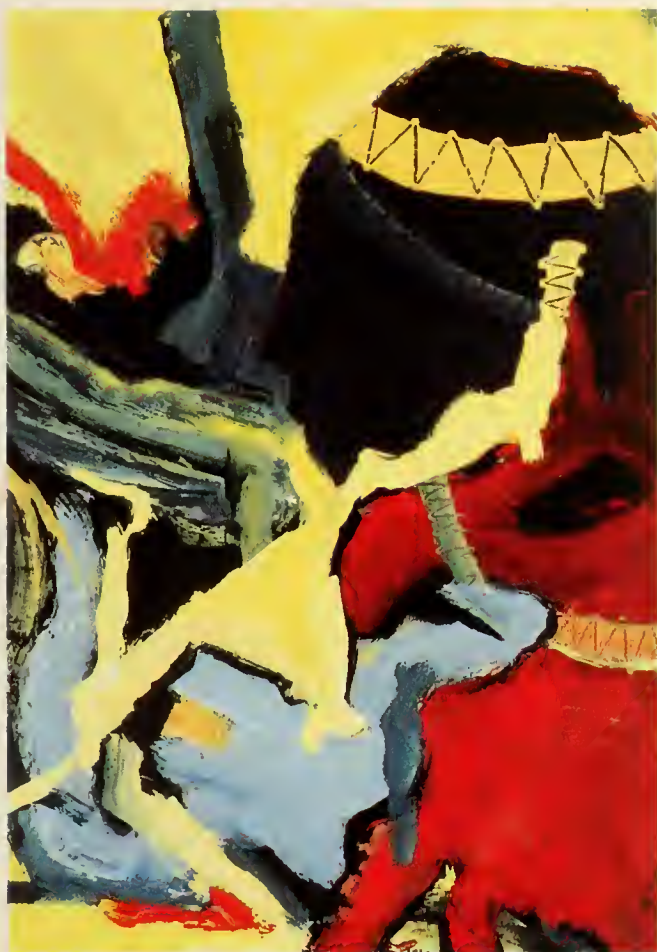
About *Selfportrait after Operation Wilfred* says: *"The operations were very painful. I lost a lot of blood. I had gone through hard times. After the fourth operation, I had consulted the witchdoctor who said this time I will be okay. He told me a witch had made me eat something to make it carry on growing. He said that if a person is sick the enemies come and bring something evil and the person will always get sick again. The witchdoctor gave me some medicine to keep the evil away. Because of my dreams it may be someone doing some evil to me. Witchdoctors can help you fight the evil spirits or they can give you evil spirits. Western medicine is practical. If there is no African disease, no witchcraft, then the Western medicine can help you. Sometimes a sickness is just sickness and then Western*



Ishmael Wilfred, *The Hammerkop*, 1996, 28 x 32cm, PVA on paper

Ishmael Wilfred, *The Love Snake*, 1996, 28 x 32cm, PVA on paper





Barbara Murray

Ishmael Wilfred, *Black Head, Red Horse*, 1996, 58 x 38cm, PVA on paper



Barbara Murray

Ishmael Wilfred, *The Battle*, 1996, 63 x 45cm, PVA on paper

medicine can heal you. If there is witchcraft then only a witchdoctor can cure you, if their medicines are strong enough. If I see something happening that I don't understand then I go and tell a witchdoctor and they advise me what to do. Cancer has changed my life. People don't recognise me now. They ask why I have changed and I say it is just part of life."

Through his paintings, Wilfred wants "people to understand that this is really happening to African people. I grew up in a Christian family who explained evil as caused by Satan. I didn't really believe that. When I started to have problems I asked my grandparents and they explained about witchcraft. My beliefs are Shona because I have grown up here. But the belief in the evil spirits and witchcraft is in every African culture. Witchcraft is witchcraft, it doesn't matter if it is Malawian or Shona. Witchcraft works, it doesn't matter what tribe you are. If someone wants to make me sick he takes magic and he knows this road that I use everyday. He talks to the medicine and says if that one passes let him be affected. Other people can pass and nothing happens to them. But if the chosen one passes the witchcraft will work on him. I don't know how it works but it works."

Wilfred refers to books on African culture "because then I can read what has really

happened to other people but seeing is believing. I have seen some very strange things. One night, after midnight, I woke up and I heard someone sweeping. I looked out the window and in the neighbour's garden there was an old woman in a black gown. She was sweeping. She wasn't moving, just sweeping and sweeping. And I looked closely to see if I was dreaming or if it was real, and definitely I was not dreaming. It really happened. It is part of witchcraft. The next morning my mother told me that there had been a funeral down the road. So something was happening, even if people don't believe. That woman is still there. When I see her I am afraid, just the way she looks at me. You never know who hates you. It is very strong. A lot of people hate. There is no reason. Sometimes you have to leave because you know some evil thing will be coming. Sometimes something pushes you to do something that you shouldn't do. If you get in fights, get hurt, it is evil spirits pushing you. God can help. If you listen to others and you go to church you can avoid trouble. In African culture, if you don't listen to the elders you get into trouble. The elders have got a lot of experience and they are trying to help you. Even the bible says listen to your elders and your days will be long. If you don't listen your days will be cut short."

Ishmael Wilfred uses PVA on paper. He

works quickly and after some hours he comes back to it. Oil takes too long to dry and the mixing of wet PVA gives the effects he seeks. He does a small sketch sometimes but often he says he sees "an image in the environment, floorboards, the clouds. Wherever I step I see images for art. I walk art, talk art, eat art and live art."

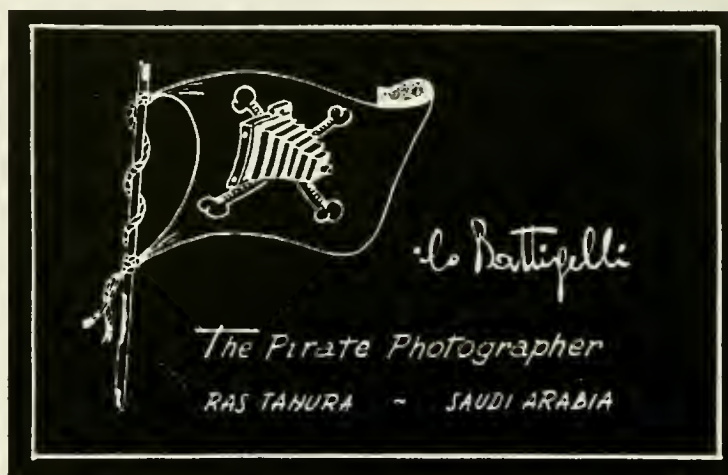
"Somebody asked me: If I buy the painting is the painting going to affect me? My paintings cannot harm you. It is only the artist's impression. My work is a way of expressing my feelings and beliefs about life."

"Paintings are an expression of myself. Paintings are an explanation of my life. Perhaps in the future I will make paintings on other subjects. Now I feel I must paint this. People paint in different ways and everybody has got his or her own feeling on what he or she is doing in the painting. A person may be painting his experience, or the community in which he lives. Some people paint their surroundings and some people paint what's happening. I paint because I want to pass a message on to people about something that they don't know. So that they get to know what is happening in the world. These paintings are a warning about the evil spirits. That they are really there and they really work."

During his recent retrospective exhibition at Gallery Delta, Ilo Battigelli spoke about his life and work

Ilo Battigelli, aged 10, working in his uncle's studio

*(opposite page)
Vecia with her birds and home, S. Daniele, Friuli, 1962*



BM: Ilo, tell me about starting photography when you were 8 years old.

IB: It was not of my own will, to start with, because my father had a brother who used to be a photographer. He opened up his own studio in 1910 in Italy. He made also his own camera. He came for summer to my town and saw this little chap, very alive, and said to my father, "*Can I get your son, Ilo, to come to me. I will send him to school and then I will teach him photography. He can be my helper.*" So my father, I don't know, he was very happy to get rid of me because I was a mischief. I already had three, four brothers and sisters, in fact we ended up with 10 brothers and sisters. So my father gave "*Yes*" to my uncle, then I travelled by train one night and I got to Santa Margarita in the afternoon. My uncle called his wife right away. "*Can you go and buy him a new pair of shoes. That is the first thing and next morning you go to school.*" And then he started to teach me a few things. First of all it was cleaning the darkroom, dusting things and helping him. When he used to go around to take photographs, I carried the tripod. The camera was an 8 x 10 with glass plates and everything was heavy for him — those days everything was on foot, not bicycling and cars.

BM: So when did you begin to take photographs?

IB: I used to go early to the studio to clean up and one morning somebody came in to have a passport picture taken and my uncle was not there. I was by myself. I must have been about 10 or 11 or so, and so I said "*Y-y-yes I'll do it.*" So, I remember the face of the man laughing and I realised he must have been so surprised at this little fellow, because I never grew too much, a *piccolino*. He said, "*Fine.*" So we went to the studio. It was a huge place about 10 metres by 15 with glass on top and glass on the sides. We didn't have electricity in the studio but daylight, and curtains on top that we used to move according to the place where we wanted the effect. So that's why we seem to always have, in those days, the beautiful soft photographs with a little bit stronger light on one side or the other. Those were little tricks in those days. So you need not only know how to click the camera, you must have something inside. You are born to be a poet. So then I did the photo.

BM: Had you never used a camera before that?

IB: I used only to look at it. That was the

very first time. Well I was watching very carefully all he did.

BM: Were you interested in photography from the very beginning?

IB: No, I was not interested. I was supposed to listen and ask questions. A little boy, 8, 9 interested in photography? He wants to play. Heh, heh, heh. And of course inside myself I also thought if I don't listen, if I don't obey, he will send me back to my family. I was a little captive in the palm of his hand you see. Anyhow I'd passed okay, more or less okay, so to print it is to see it. So then my uncle was very happy and he says to me, "*Fine I like the enterprise of your own and from tomorrow I will teach you all the things.*"

So we started and everytime some studio photograph was to be done he used to come to sit in the corner and watch. You know, in those days, it was a matter of five or six or seven, eight seconds of exposure and you used to move the backdrops to make the picture. We had an album in the studio with copies of the photographs we used to do. When a customer came in we opened the album and asked, "*Which one would you like to have?*" So one morning, this young



lady came in and she says, "I want a studio photograph." And I said, "I-I-I-I'll do it." Then she starts laughing and only many years later I tried to realise how she was so surprised to see a little chap saying very proudly, "I'm going to do it." She must have been 20, I don't know. So then she turned the pages of the album and, my goodness, she took up a décolleté. In those days there were a lot of pictures of ladies with naked shoulders, soft, turning one side. And she picked one with a very low décolleté and a veil. I looked and I start blushing, before I even started I start blushing! I says to myself, "How in the hell can I take a picture of this young lady with naked, naked ... impossible!" Well anyhow I went to the darkroom and with trembling hands I loaded the films, the plates, and then I put her onto the seat and then, still my trembling hands, I set the little veil around her shoulders, not too high, not too low, and I could see her eyes full of great fun. Anyhow I did the photograph. She collected. She was most happy. My uncle was very happy and he says, "From today you are allowed to take portraits but be very careful when you deal with ladies!"

During the day we used to do lots of commercial work. We used to go round, take pictures of buildings *etcetera*. He taught me how to set the camera and how to move to get the straight line, all the tricks in photography that you have to do. And we used to carry, to do landscape, a branch of a tree with leaves to give a foreground. And he was so kind, he always taught me as much as he could. From that time I started to do other things, weddings *etcetera*. I used to go to the garden to photograph the children. By then I loved it and my uncle used to push me. Any magazines, he used to show to me pictures, what is good, what is bad, you know. I remember all the things he taught me, like a father to a boy.

Then of course, after the war of Abyssinia, Italy was flooded with taxes and there was a moment of crisis. So my uncle had to close the studio. He sold the studio to somebody else because he couldn't make it and I went to my native town again. I was then about 15, 16. This man opened a studio but he had to report to the army, they call you. So he spotted me and he asked, and officially I opened the studio on his behalf. I used to do all the work. This photograph (Vecia with her birds and home) is my town. You can read, you can play music, you can play violin, or the piano, you can tell stories. And that is my life, every stone. This doesn't exist anymore, the earthquake destroyed everything. Unfortunately beauty has always been connected with poverty. Because, often people, they have nothing more than to be able to make the best of the little things that they have, the simple things. So there is so much of life, to put into life, love.

Then my father went to Eritrea, to Africa, and he called us to join him. So with my mother and my brothers we went to Africa. It was very tough in Eritrea but I found work with a firm that had connections with the newspaper and started to be trained in taking pictures for publicity and sport and news. I enjoyed it very much and whatever it was I did my best and I learned because I wanted to learn.

Then of course I used to do freelance also for the newspaper with a bicycle and a camera. You have to carry two lights and a stand and 20 metres of wire and go to the party and hold the lights and take pictures. When I think of those days you know it's amazing, how I did it. I had so much enthusiasm. Imagine, on a bicycle, the camera, a stand, two lights, the wire and a tripod! We were in Asmara, a big city. Whenever they had functions we went. I remember a day I went to a wedding and I went to the wrong church. I waited for the bride and groom. We had the monks there and they were all my friends, so they phoned to the other cathedral and the wedding was there so I got on the bicycle, with my lights, my tripod, my stuff and when I got to the other cathedral they were already coming down the steps! So what to do? So I said, "Fermi, fermi momento!" I called the monk in the church and I said, "What if I do so and so and so? We got to take at least one picture while you give communion." He was very amused so he called everybody back to the church. He put on the *paramenti* of the priest. He called them to the altar and I took a picture while they were having communion. Heh heh heh. Everybody was happy. Those things I used to do and they obliged. Set the lights in the church with the family waiting outside *etcetera*. And then I laugh because whenever you go, you as photographer, you can move everywhere. They don't say don't move. You move because you're looking for a spot. So I used to observe what they do, what they did, the furniture, the *ambiente*. That was very interesting and I love it.

BM: How do you choose your spot? What sort of things do you think of?

IB: Well, to be true, having had my uncle so much teaching me, now to choose the proper corners, to avoid the wrong backgrounds, wrong lightings, it comes natural to me. So, while I was there, the first thing I did, even while I was thinking, I was already looking where I could set my people, how I could do it, how much I had to keep to give exposure, and those things they come to you, but there must have been with me a great desire to learn. You know, because it is within me. Always if somebody cross the road in ten seconds, I like to cross the road in five seconds. That has been always my way. When you read books *etcetera*, you read about people doing great things, and I said, "I can do it better than him." Not modest

I'm afraid. If I was modest I wouldn't have been here now. I would be still serving, moving things in the studio. So that is it.

And there of course the war came, and it was not easy. Well in anycase, to be short, when the war was over we were prisoners officially. Then the English came and it doesn't matter where you are, it was very bad. There was no work. I did all sorts of things to survive. Then they opened up digging for oil in Saudi Arabia and they needed manpower to do it. The Americans made an agreement with the British and about 3000 of us, still prisoners, all in one box, went to Saudi Arabia. We had very little pay, very cheap money, we lived under the tents. So that's how I ended up in Arabia.

BM: And you had your camera with you?

IB: No, I did not have a camera but I had been hired as a photographer. They took four photographers. They had 3000 and what they wanted they took and the rest they sent them back. Like you buy a bag of potatoes, you take the good potatoes. So we went there, out of four we remained two of us. I had all this experience and they put me into the laboratory and I started work with four, five cameras, speed graphics and flashes *etcetera*, and of course, I knew my job so they put me in the engineering department.

And then I had a boss who was American. One day he came with a special job and tells me how to do it. And I says, "I'm sorry, it's not working this way. This is how to do it because... because... because..." And he says, "I am your boss. I tell you how to do it." I said, "Yes, sir!" So I went to the darkroom. I did it and it was worse. I did it worse. And he was very happy. A week later I was summoned to the head office and all my 16 x 20 pictures on the table. So, the director look at me and he says, "Did you print these?" I said, "Yes." He says, "They are all wrong." I said, "Yes I know." He says, "What do you mean you know?" I says, "Yes I know. It is wrong here, wrong here and wrong there." He looks at me with a stone face and says, "Why did you do it?" "Because my boss, Mr so-and-so, when I told him that it was wrong to do it this way, he told me that he was my boss and to do as he said." So next thing the boss was fired and I became supervisor. Then I started to travel. Do you have plenty?

BM: Of tape? Yes I have lots.

IB: Good. Heh heh heh. Because I can talk until 12 o'clock tomorrow. So then I became somebody because before we were kept down. Anyhow I tried to do my best, also because I liked it. If the work is to be done, you check each piece each time and if there is mistake you do it again. And not to take an hour if you can do it in half an hour.

So I think they did appreciate and they allowed me a few liberties sometimes. But I wanted to be able to move from one camp to another. We had a camp at the beach with an iron belt around. You couldn't move and if you move out of it you must have permission because the Arabs didn't want any interference in the towns. You were not allowed to go. So I said, "My goodness, I want to take pictures." Because I felt it was the first time it was possible in Arabia so I must make some photographs. What can you do? What can you do?

Then one day I said, "Took, I get permission." And I went to see the manager, the president of the company in the other settlement, and when I got there he wasn't there. His wife says to me, "He is in a meeting so why not wait?" When he came he found me playing with his children on the floor. So I greeted him and I said, "My goodness, you have two lovely children and I would like to take some pictures of them." So he was very happy and he said, "Yes, why not?" "But," I said, "I haven't got the materials I need." And he says, "We'll get it from Cairo" and a week later the paper arrived. I did the photographs. He was very happy. So he gave me official freedom to do things openly within the camp.

BM: This one, Ilo, was this in the camp in Arabia?

IB: Yes. I was there for eight years. That is my studio.

BM: Why the 'Pirate' Ilo?

IB: You know, when I had the place made into a darkroom, I said, "I must get a name. 'Ilo Battigelli, photographer' sounds very big. Or 'Ilo Battigelli and Son', like Antonio and Sons." I says, "I'm not very big, I've no son." So then we heard of a story, in the bay near the camp, according to legend, one of the last pirates came there. The pirate is a boat with six or ten men that travel along the coast and when they see a village they anchor, they go to the village, they try to steal what they can, they go away. So I said, "Ha, a pirate" because even the stories told, all are embellished. "Lovely," I said, "Tomorrow morning I'm going to be Ilo the Pirate!"

So I build up the story, I have the flag, the sign, *etchetera* and everything came about. This caught, it was a curiosity, a fable. If you are a good clown, they accept you as a clown. And my photography was good. Matter of fact, there was an American Commodore, he called me. So we went there to his ship and the manager says, "The Commodore wants you to take a picture." And I says, "Why?" "Because back in New York at the base, he heard several times from sailors that there was a pirate who used to take photographs, very beautiful. So he says I want to meet this pirate and see

what face he has and I want my picture taken by him so when I go back to the base I can say Ilo the Pirate took my photograph." So he invited me to the ship for supper. I went as usual with my ring, my scarf, my shirt with all cuts around and the boots. I went by car to the harbour and there was a speed boat with a flag and one lieutenant waiting for me. He salutes. I stood next to the flag and we drove to the ship and then up the ladder and at the top there was the commander and others waiting, all standing to attention. Salute! So I'm a bit of an actor, I cannot help it. I love it. Heh heh heh heh heh. I love it, I always love it. So he introduced me to each officer. Each one stood at attention, hand salute. And I enjoyed it. I made it very slow so it lasted as long as possible. Then he took me around to show me all the boat, the engines *etchetera* and we went down to the quarters for supper. And then I said, "I would like to take a photograph." I took my camera because if you tell stories but don't take the picture, people tell you you say balony. So I always took my camera to prove. And then after supper, we go back to the tent and I said, "One hour ago I shake hands with the officers and now I'm back to my little tent."

BM: What is this one, Ilo?

IB: That is inside my studio. That was the flag, that was the sign, all the pictures on the door, the same as now.

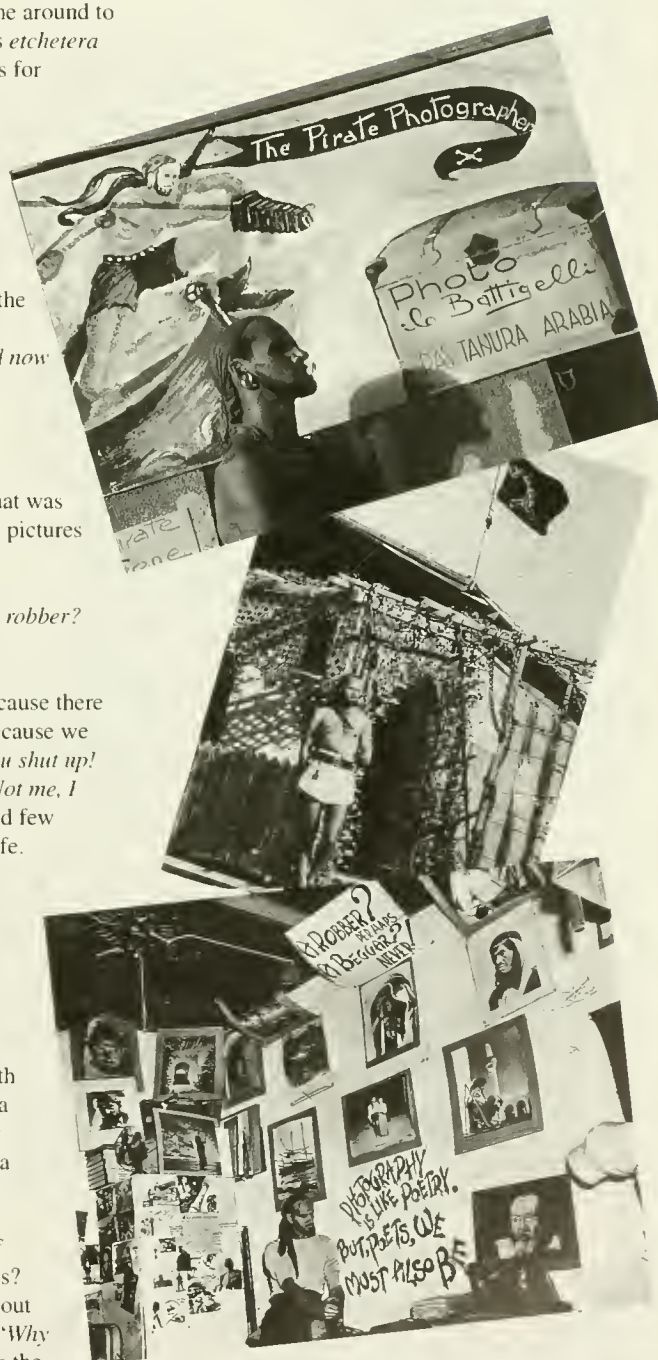
BM: And did you write this: "A robber? perhaps. A beggar? never!"

IB: Yes, that was my motto. Because there we were second-class people. Because we lost the war we were treated. "You shut up! You lost the war." And I said, "Not me, I never lost the war." So I invented few slogans. I never did beg in my life.

BM: And, "Photography is like poetry, but poets we must also be." Did you also write that?

IB: Yes. You know you have plenty of time to dream. Eight years to dream, in the desert, with nothing and the mind: doo doo da doo da doo. Everybody has only one life to live and I lived under a blinking tent.

So then I want to take pictures of Arabia. How to go to the villages? How to be allowed to travel without being stopped? Then I thought, "Why not go to the emir?" So I went to the emir. I greeted him, a little bit in Arabic, a little bit in Italian, so they think I'm bilingual you know, heh heh. And then I said, "I know you have children." "Yes." "Oh I would like to photograph them." So I



(above) Outside his studio, Saudi Arabia

(below) Inside his studio, Saudi Arabia

photographed the children and I gave him the pictures. So slowly, slowly we became friends. We used to hold hands together and have tea together. Then I said, "*I know it is not easy but is there some way I could move sometime to take photographs?*" So he told me to meet such-and-such a man and I started to move around because I had the silent 'okay' of the emir. A lot of the pictures I could never get to do otherwise. This one we saw the camels from a distance and we followed and I took about 12 photos across the sand dunes, always the camels.

BM: Ilo, the photo of the mother with the baby, the eyes, how did you manage to take that?

IB: In Arabia, already with the blessing of the emir, we were travelling from A to B in the desert. There, there are maybe sometimes one hundred kilometres when there is not a soul, just sand, then maybe some few Bedouins, two, three tents, women around, a water well. We saw this group of women, Bedouin, with no man. And I asked the driver to stop. He says, "*Don't be mad.*" I says, "*I'm not mad. I just walk.*" So I start walking slowly, slowly, slowly, and then all the women turned to me to see what I was doing. In the meantime I saw this woman with the child and my heart stopped. I said, "*Look at that.*" A woman, a child, is eternally like the Virgin Mary with the child, like every mother under the sun. It is the same thing, the same thought, the same love, the same condition and more because this is very impossible to photograph, a Bedouin woman with a child. So I come close, very close. So I say a few things and then I click few times and I got a beautiful photo.

In Arabia I fell on the springtime of my photographic life, because it was forbidden. Everywhere else you can take pictures but not there.

And some American wanted to buy some Arabian horses and he came and says I must take some pictures. So I went with him into many palaces *etcetera*. Really otherwise it was impossible to be a guest of an emir in a palace then. That is the assistant to the emir of the place where we went to photograph the horses, so there we were official guests. That is the palace where he lives. It was such a magnificent place, gold, silver. But I didn't dare to take a photograph. The emir was also the Minister of Justice, very fair, but if things happened, the first thing he did he pulled out his sword and "tok" and the head rolled down. That is what we heard. Whether it is true or not I don't know but that is the story.

Because I went to the emir and had tea with him, I met people from different places and they would invite me because they knew I was a friend of the emir. So I went to different towns and saw different people. Then I was given \$10 a day to travel around



(above) *Mother and Child in Saudi Desert, 1947*

(top right) *A Camel Trio, 1948*

(middle right) *Drying Fish in the Sun, Bosphorus, Turkey, 1954*

(bottom right) *Pearl Diver, Persian Gulf, 1950*

and take photographs and I began to save. I had a friend from Palestine. He was a refugee who worked with me and next I said, "I want to go to the Holy Land." So when I arrived in Jerusalem the whole family of this Palestinian was waiting for me. They gave me a welcome. They took me all over the holy places. They told me all the stories and I took hundreds of photos. I met different people. I was one day near the stone, the Holy Sepulchre, and I looked through and I saw two black eyes. "My goodness," I says, "What black eyes!" The friend says, "Come I introduce you." And she was an Armenian lady who had come for the festivities and we start talking and she says she has come from Syria. And I said, "I shall come and see you." And to keep that promise then I start travelling and I met her. When she took me to her house, she says to me, "Because there are the family" *et cetera*, "we introduce you as a monk from the Holy Land." So I got dressed up and everything and when I got there, the mother came to open the door and she addressed me as 'Father' and she kissed my hand, and the girl with laughing eyes there behind. We went upstairs for sweet drinks and cakes, *et cetera*, and they were asking questions about the Holy Land and I made a lovely lecture. All the children. I blessed them, put my hand, all the ladies kissed my hand... heh heh heh heh. So the mother says, "You better take this reverendo, this Father, to the monastery on top of the hill that is very famous." So next morning, there was the girl and the driver and the chaperone, the brother of the girl. Off we went, tooo tooo tooo, up to the hill and I could move around and took lovely pictures. And in this beautiful place, so romantic, I promised the girl, "I will marry you." Then a lot of other things happened, here and there, and a year later I was in Italy, my brother from Genoa phoned me and he says, "What have you done?" I says, "Nothing." "There is a man here, six feet tall, looking for you, says you promised to marry his sister." He says, "My goodness, come!" So I went straight to Genoa. We went to the highest, richest hotel in Genoa. There is this man, six feet tall, with a white coat. He looks at me, from top to bottom, and he says, "Are you Ilo?" I says, "Yes," looking up. Says, "You promised to marry my sister." I said, "Yes, I - I - I will marry her." Heh heh heh. I says, "I am going around the world. When I come back *et cetera*" I said, "I'm going to write to her. She has to bring me children, to work, to stay in the shop, all these things, to cook *et cetera*, *et cetera*." So eventually I never heard anymore. Thank goodness.

So all these things they lead you. Whenever you go, you meet somebody, you go some place and take some time. There is always a human touch for everything I do and I photograph.

BM: Ilo, are your photos like memories,

stories for you?

IB: Well, each one is a story. There is one taken on the Bosphorus. We took the bus to go to the ocean. When we got there I saw beautiful mosques reflected in the water, beautiful landscapes which if you walk on the ground you don't see but from the top of the bus you see. So then I saw a sign "Forbidden to go to the top. Forbidden to take photographs." So, thank you very much, that is the place I must go! So with my camera hidden in my jacket I go. When I got to the top of the hill the only thing, looking down, was an iron gate which they opened to let the ships go through. That was all. So then I came back without even taking pictures because it doesn't mean a thing.

BM: What is it about something that makes you want to take a photograph?

IB: Something photographically, something beautiful, composition, novelty, something that you don't encounter every moment. It is only by walking around, you see lovely landscapes, but you have a foreground. On the trip back from the Bosphorus I told the driver, "You go, I come by myself." Everybody left. They thought I was crazy. Maybe I was, and then I start walking back. By walking back, the things that I have seen, the photographs I took! One of those is the men mending nets, all the lovely things that you don't see from the bus. So I arrived in the evening back in Constantinople. I didn't take the photo on top of the hill because there was nothing catching my attention, my love. When I see something unusual and beautiful I feel trembling inside and that is one of those things.

The girl with the fish. That was in Turkey, on the Bosphorus.

BM: I notice that a lot of your photos are of very pretty girls.

IB: Well, beauty is beauty. Beauty is everywhere. Nature made them like that, it's not my fault. Heh heh. Ahh! oh yes! But my goodness, it stank fish so much. She must have been young. I asked her, because they were carrying fish, I asked her to come. I put her here, next to the fish and I moved the hand here. Then I bring the fish and I put it and click.

BM: So that is one of the few posed photographs?

IB: Yes. The pearl diver is also composed. You go out in the boat to watch. The oysters are in the bottom, where you see the bubbles coming up. They go down with the net, one, two, three, they go down for four minutes! When we reached the shallow water I asked the man to go on his knees and got this photograph. It is beautiful, the eyes and the water.

Ilo the Pirate



Ilo the Pirate



Ilo the Pirate





Ilo the Pirate



Ilo the Pirate

Anyway then I travel again. I had 100 photographs of Arabia which I used to display in the foyers of the hotels. In those days nobody knew about Arabia, so it was a novelty. I gave these exhibitions and I never charged a penny. So people used to come to me and say, "Why don't you charge?" And I said, "I have \$10 dollars a day which I saved in Arabia and then I like to meet people." So very often they say, "Come to my home and stay few days." You enter each family. You see how they live, what they eat, how they dress. It's going not just like a tourist boom boom boom, first places then going back home. I still have people who write to me after 30, 40 years, friends.

BM: There is a lovely photograph of some girls at a fountain.

IB: Well, Italy, 1948, just a few years after the war, Rome was in shambles. Many things were not yet restored. I was walking around trying to get some candid shots, something alive, something which had a story but as I say every time you point a camera either they pose or they run away.

There was a lack of everything. And when I saw there were plenty of these places selling bread and things, it attracted me very much because I was not used to see this in a place like Rome. These two women talking, one to the other, with the foot resting, and I waited and waited, when all at once this one starts walking away. She noticed that I was pointing the camera so she says something. The other one was laughing. Even there you can write stories — the spaghetti, the box, the shoe, this gives you the time, the 40s, the hair, everything. That is the beauty which photography gives you that no other art can do. With painting you can put, change places, change something to resolve feeling but a photograph is there.

Then I went to America, travelling with my 18 photographs of Arabia. In New York, I wanted to show a little man, cold, with

nothing and I waited and I waited. I used to sit. I was waiting to get some life. People were passing but I didn't want them. You've got to wait until the right moment comes. People think it's easy, that you just go click. Your eye does not only look once. It goes there and there and comes back.

One night it was cold, snow, I went to the main underground station where it was nice and hot, air conditioned. In that place was a playing machine, you put a coin and they play music. So I was there eating my sandwich and getting warm and I saw people coming in, all Italians, and they used to put coins in and get all Italian records, sometimes crying. This old man after listening to these songs, I asked him, "Where you from?" and he told me and I said, "Have you been?" and he said, "I haven't been to Italy for three years and I can't get enough money to pay for my journey." These stories they come always from the heart. You know that is really life. I like to talk to people and you hear from everybody something and because I ask a respectful question the answer is true.

Anyhow then it was Christmas and you know I had this little Arabian cap, like the Arabs wear, and with the little beard *etcetera*. On the 23rd I phoned to a friend of mine used to be a colonel of the marines in Saudi Arabia. Nice people. So he says, "You're mad you will never spend Christmas in New York in the cold with \$10 a day. Get on the bus and come here." So I got on the bus travelled for three days to Albany, Georgia. He used to be in charge of a marines' depot. So when I arrived there, there were officers moving, a whole crowd waiting expecting Ilo the Pirate, come from Arabia, a friend of the colonel, such a welcome. I gave some exhibitions of the photographs and some talks. One day he said, "I have arranged an art evening for you, prepare with all your paraphenalia and your pictures." It was a big house with bricks, like *Gone with the Wind*, all the

ladies dressed up. They gave me champagne and spotlight. Each photo I said what it was but as people didn't know you can embellish. Heh heh heh heh. So here was more champagne and more pictures and I was the hero of the night. I felt I was one of the actors of *Gone with the Wind*. I always talked myself into it.

That one of the hands, that was taken in Georgia. I always walk, and I saw this old lady, in one place, far away. As soon as I saw her, rightaway in my mind, there was a set, a composition that I wanted to do. So then I came very slowly, watching, I spoke Italian, and when you speak a different language people look at your eyes and your mouth not at what you are doing. Meantime I was correcting and clicking. Then still when I was walking I saw those two beautiful hands. When I see something unusual and beautiful I feel trembling inside and that is one of those things. Where do you find that? That you can write poetry about, you can write music, you can write a book of history, you can do anything, because those hands, they do and they destroy, everything which has been done before. Those are the soul of the body.

The colonel of the marines gave me addresses of people where to go. I travelled, and to Texas and then to Mexico. When I got to Los Angeles there was a letter from my brother. My mother was sick. So I said, "Fine the trip around the world is finished. My mother is more important than that." Then I planned to settle in Italy but after awhile you know the call of Africa was too strong. I used to have to be in Genoa, at my brother's shop there. Then one day somebody came to the shop, speaking English. He said he came from Africa. Then another day another one come from Africa, and I start building up feelings and then one day a third one said, "I come from Northern Rhodesia." I said, "Where is Northern Rhodesia?" And a little later I met another man I had known from before who



said he was living in Rhodesia. "And who is the beautiful girl?" "It is my wife." "My goodness, in such a place you met such a beautiful girl." And we start laughing. Then he left. Then I said, "Rhodesia, Rhodesia." So I wrote to him and six months later I was here ... to get Africa off my chest. And after 40 years I'm still here. Then I was absorbed by the construction of Kariba Dam. I wanted to go there, to eat with them and talk with them and drink wine with them and take pictures of them at work. Those days were different. There is so much to remember. Kariba was such a magnificent, immense thing, those days, something pharaonic. But it has so many different pictures to be taken. You couldn't put everything in one photograph. This one is a worker at Kariba. You see the man. The light is here on the helmet and the background was completely black in the tunnel. I saw him faraway, smoking, and I was waiting. I saw the face, the pleasure, the work, the toil, everything, the cigarette smoke, very gently smoking, holding it delicately so it lasts more, the fingernails cut accordingly, the little one is already a bit longer.

That is also Zimbabwe, with the bambina, a touch of deeply felt lovely soft humanity. There you have three generations, and I caught by chance the happiness with this little child, the hands very content, the mother with such a soft smile, the old grandmama looking. You can write a story, you can write a life book, you can write so many things on a photo like that. Plus the background gives nice feelings, the kitchen, the life of a woman, a mother, half of it is spent in the kitchen unless she is an engineer, but usually.

BM: Is there one of the photos on exhibition that is your favourite?

IB: Well I like human faces. The human face is an encyclopedia. It depends on the person who knows how to read. I like people. You can learn something from everyone. You've got to read the body, to have a face expressing things strongly, a landscape or other things according to the composition *et cetera*. So the one that really to me is my best photograph is the one of the old man 105 years old. The old face of the man with the wrinkles, you can look at it and you can look at it and you can look at it again. And every time you see something different. It is all the humanity converging into the face of one human. So depending upon all what your thoughts are, are in that face. To me that is the best. Here you can see the Arabs. You see he is smiling a little.

BM: Who was he, Ilo? Did you know him?

IB: No. I was passing by a mosque one day and he was seated there, reading the beads, you know, praying with beads, one two

three. So I went to him and I said something then I walk up and down and keep talking and then I move back and took two shots. Always a thought behind every photograph. Particularly I like always faces, because the human face is an open book. It doesn't matter where you come from, what language. It has universal language. It is your face and your eyes. And if you can see and catch those moments ...



(top) Shaft Construction Worker's Respite, Kariba, Zimbabwe, 1958

(middle) A Welsh Granny at the Vumba, Zimbabwe, 1967

(below) 105 Year-Old Arabian Patriarch, Saudi Arabia, 1947

Landscapes of Zimbabwe by Robert Paul, Victoria Gallery, Bath, England, September–November 1996

In eighteenth-century Bath, a town of golden masonry, Georgian crescents and carved street names, Landscapes of Zimbabwe was a deeply exotic exhibition title. Not being very familiar with Robert Paul's work, I was struck by the ease with which it transferred to this setting. Its subjects — wild beaches, African wilderness, Nyanga mists and so on — are exotic, but they were produced within the compass of a thoroughly European aesthetic.

Paul was educated in Bath and well known to have been a friend of John Piper and Ivon Hitchens, central figures in a romantically inflected branch of postwar British landscape painting. Their impact on Paul seems to have been at most spasmodic; Patricia Broderick's memory of his having been deeply attracted to Bonnard's colour conveys a more profound sense of 'influence'. Bonnard's extraordinary conjunctions of mauve, brown, blue and pink are transformed in Paul's paintings into a means of conveying the physical structure of landscape, an unchanging substructure that sustains the accidents of vegetation and human traces and the evanescent effects of light. In contrast, Piper's legacy appears in, for instance, the drawing *Cecil House*, as a decorative mode, full of charm and whimsy.

There is very little of the deliberate construction of 'place' — real or imaginary, with complex interweavings of past and present — that is familiar in the work of Paul's contemporaries like Hitchens and Sutherland, though there are intense evocations, particularly in the works on paper, of atmosphere and weather. It is not surprising then, that he is most convincing when the paintings depart from the facts of the subject, from a relationship, that is, with topographical exactitude, to recreate passing glimpses of light, wind and water. Two gouaches titled *Qolora, Transkei*, painted a decade apart, hung side by side, as if to demonstrate the point. The first, dated 1951, is an almost hard-edged rendering of sea and sky, exact but untransformed; the second, a turbulent mass of rich colour overlaid with swirls of black is alive with the heat of a sea wind and the frenzy of whipped waves.

Paul's eclectic use of media and his constant experimentation are fundamental to any reading of his work. Ink, sometimes a medium simply for fast, economical representation, might become almost literally a flight of fantasy, as it did in a gouache drawing of 1979, *The Montclair* (see *Gallery* no 1 p6). It shows a rocky terrain, covered with loose, vibrant areas of fresh green vegetation, above which a bird flies, followed by a long, trailing black line, meandering in a jagged, zany flight path, a



Robert Paul, *Beira*

process of drawing where the pen bypassed the mind in an act of autonomous imagination. At other times Paul's media ranged from wax resist to gouache and ink overlaid with fingerprints, suggesting that he pushed the paint around like a kind of one-dimensional sculpture. A delicious late drawing, *Beira*, sets out the lineaments of the town in fine and witty detail, overlaid with patches of uncharacteristically high, bright reds and blues, recalling with elegant economy the sense of release that the beaches brought to those who came from a landlocked country. Oil paint, though, or rather Paul's unusual combination of oil and egg tempera, was a medium of substance, a more solemn matter, adopted to convey the depth, the endurance of landscape, laid on in heavy blocks of colour that suggest resistance to change, to human intervention, even to the vagaries of natural light and climatic infelicities.

Lack of space at Bath's Victoria Art Gallery demanded a rigorous selection, so that not all the available work was on view. A decision was also taken to reframe many of the paintings, resulting in an extremely well selected exhibition, admirably hung to indicate a coherent development throughout the artist's career. It was accompanied, filled out and recorded by a beautifully produced book*, with numerous black and white and colour reproductions. It contains particularly interesting essays by Paul's daughter, Colette Wiles, and Patricia Broderick, who knew him in later life and provides invaluable insights into his painting practice. *Margaret Garlake*

*C. Wiles et al., *Robert Paul*, Harare, 1996, ISBN 0 7974 1614 5.

Editor's note: The book, *Robert Paul*, contains essays by Colette Wiles, Brian Bradshaw, Francois Roux, Patricia Broderick and Martin van der Spuy, as well as 92 illustrations of which 28 are in colour. It will be on sale in Zimbabwe in the near future.

Balancing Act, paintings by Paul Wade, Sandro's, October 1996

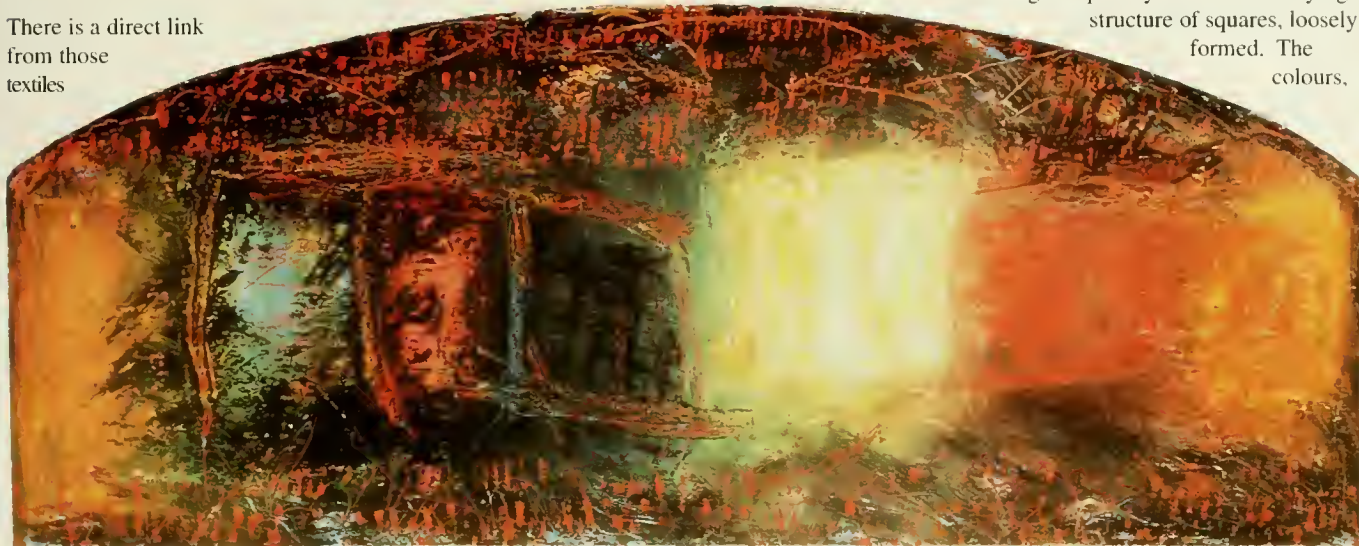
When Paul Wade first appeared on the local art scene in 1986 he exhibited textiles which were unique on the Zimbabwean art platform at the time. They were soft sculptures in which the weave, the weft and warp, in colourful combinations, became irregular, breaking up the formal rectangle into sculptural shapes. Materials used included wool, metal, plastic, paper and tin foil.

There is a direct link from those textiles

backgrounds are formed by spasmodic spaces which like gigantic musical intervals provide a kind of counterpoint to the various themes. And beyond the initial sense of the pleasure the artist takes in the possibilities of the paint itself is a underlying thoughtfulness. Each work has a specific subject and Wade employs not only line, colour and image but also a variety of physical formats to convey his meanings. His series of small icons, heavily framed in gold, can be interpreted as tombs where the

plummeting through realms of painterly freedom. The broad scratch marks evoke a tangle of tattered and breaking feathers; a passionate confusion.

Icon for Rosa Parks celebrates in a warm and gentle way her strength and beauty of soul. The curved wooden board on which it is painted is at once as mundane as a bus with windows, as simple and homely as a headboard for a bed, and as sacred and venerable as a holy shrine. The hidden strength is portrayed in the underlying structure of squares, loosely formed. The colours,



to the works on show in *Balancing Act*. Colour and energy breaking out of the confines of flat canvas or wood is the overall impression of this vigorous exhibition. The artist has taken a path through exploration of paint, closely harnessed investigation and the bringing out of the subconscious in random markings. His search is for natural signs; it toys with the bizarre and creates with colourful, gestural indicators, a pulse of life. The scratch marks and vivid impasto give Wade's work an almost organic presence similar to those past weavings with their knots and bushy tangles. Here the paint invigorates the pictorial image giving the spectator an atmospheric vibration. The

iconographic figure disappears leaving only the aura.

Celestial Equator, the largest canvas on show, depicts an expansive vibrating line of energy cutting between a dark and a light. Orange and purple flashes break out and leap across this division, an exchange of atoms. This painting would have a stronger impact if divided to form a diptych. The six doors split into four and two would further evoke a meeting of energies.

The Fall II shows an Icarus figure plunging downwards through a spin of colour — red on blue, blue on orange and pink —

softly applied to melt and blend, emerge from a dark ground with here and there scratches through to reveal bright pure pigment.

In contrast, *Icon for Malcolm X* is an aggressive work in cruciform shape, constructed of hard wood squares set expressively on edge, pierced and hammered together with gold painted nails. The surfaces of these squares are broken, cracked, scratched. Brushstrokes and lines wildly score the dark. This is a monument for a survivor — struggle, violence, blackness and a victory.

The sixteen painted cubes that make up *Playtime* are inspired by a child's coloured blocks. Paul Wade has crafted an intriguing work which enables the viewer/owner to make up his or her own work of art, a different one each morning. By rearranging and placing the blocks, an estimated 2.8 million million artworks are possible. *Playtime* is the sort of work that should be permanently available at the National Gallery to invite active visitor participation. Also on show were the *Butterfly* series which broke the edge of the serious work and would have been better excluded.

The urgency and drive, the spontaneous, colourful paint strokes, with which Paul Wade sets down his intentions immediately compel us to look, if not listen, to what he is compressing in his investigation of the subconscious. *Helen Lieros*



(above) Paul Wade, *Icon for Rosa Parks*

(right) Paul Wade, *The Fall II*

Street Sellers of Zimbabwe Stone Sculpture: Artists and Entrepreneurs by Clive and Maricarol Kileff, Gweru: Mambo Press, 1996 (Pp 68 \$94.65)

"In the literary world, Shakespeare's Hamlet has been produced millions of times, yet this mass production of text has not changed the essence of the work ... as in literature, the popularization of stone sculpture has allowed novice-collectors and laymen of the art world to begin an appreciation of aesthetics."

This astonishing piece of intellectual flim-flam, in the Introduction to *Street Sellers of Zimbabwe Stone Sculpture*, is as much as one needs to know about the theoretical framework of the book, and the intrusive hyphen in 'novice-collectors' (people with a fondness for trainee nuns, perhaps?) is a foretaste of the typographical salad served up on nearly every page that follows. Nor does George Kahari's Foreword inspire confidence, with its suggestion that Robert Paul, Helen Lieros and Never Kayowa, far from being painters, are in fact *"in Sang-writing and Composition"*. Shame on you, George! (And shame on Mambo's editor for the proliferation of Capital Letters.)

All of which is a pity, because inside this untidy little book, an important narrative is struggling to escape.

The protagonists in *Street Sellers...* are the street sellers themselves. Shorn of the rickety academic scaffolding into which they have been poked, and given a more rigorous approach to the economic and social intricacies of their calling, we could have had a fascinating account of the country's bristling informal sector.

Some engaging glimpses, not surprisingly, do emerge. Costa Gurupira, for instance, spotting the market for 'peace sign' pendants, and gearing his production accordingly; the women who commute to Cape Town's pavements, trading their suitcases full of stone for a return flow of fridges and televisions; Sonny Sameal, happier carving rhinos than he ever was working underground in the mines, or overground as a security guard.

This is the stuff of our national life; why burden it with a cargo of lazy taxonomy and even lazier theory?

For those of us suckled on the idea of deference to scholarship, the dissonance between the author's credentials and his production is a real puzzle. In his Acknowledgements, Dr Clive Kileff thanks the University of Tennessee for *"granting me a sabbatical ... to gather information, conduct research, and prepare this manuscript."* Cynics might say that they were glad to be rid of him for a while.
Murray McCartney

EzeMatojeni: paintings by the late Todd Dube, National Gallery in Bulawayo, August/September 1996

In memory of Todd Dube, the Bulawayo artist, Voti Thebe, wrote:

*"You have painted and adorned
The hills of Matopos,
Rivers and rivulets.
You have reminded me of the days
herding my father's goats.
You have adorned almost all the trees."*

This exhibition of over 40 watercolours and oils, aptly entitled EzeMatojeni, was a celebration of Todd Dube's life as an artist, which was brought to an untimely end in a motorcycle accident in 1995, and also a celebration of the source of his inspiration — the landscape of the Matopos.

Born on New Year's day in 1968 in Kezi District of Matopos, Todd Dube did his secondary schooling in Bulawayo. Despite early ambitions to be a doctor and relentless pressure from family and relatives who felt that he should carry on with academic studies to university level, quietly and resolutely Dube soldiered on in pursuit of his goal to create a name as a landscape artist. He enrolled with the Bulawayo Technical College School of Art and Design and paid his way through college from the proceeds of sales of his paintings.

Todd Dube's love of nature's serenity was a thread running through his entire work, reinforced more so by images of water, dams and even puddles. His mind's eye captured the still waters snaking below the grey granite outcrops, along unploughed fields, over the setting sun. You can almost smell the dust kicked by the mealie-laden donkeys in the piece, *The Burden of the Beasts*. Attachment to community was another side of Dube's work. He did paintings showing women collecting water, firewood or thatching grass, and boys rounding up cattle home from grazing.

Opening the exhibition, John Nkomo said, *"Every stroke of paint was a joyful one ... We find solace in the paintings around us which were Todd's vision."*
Busani Bafana

**Heritage Exhibition, National Gallery,
November-January (Harare), February-
March (Bulawayo) 1996**

The National Gallery is once more filled with work that attempts to represent the outpouring of artistic effort in Zimbabwe, and this year it is a good show. The variety of individual approach is more marked than in recent years with young artists stealing the

thunder. Ishmael Wilfred has won the Overall Award for Distinction in Painting for *Dwarf*, as well as an Award of Merit for *Red Eagle*, both vibrant parts of his expressionistic exploration of the African spirit world with its witches and their underlings. Shepherd Mahufe,

creating, in contrast, a strongly shaped and shadowed depiction of daily reality, *Carry Food*, has won the other Award of Merit for painting. Amongst those whose work was Highly Commended is Hilary Kashiri with an energetic and colourful rendering, *Commuter Rank II*. It is impressive to see how these three young painters' work has developed in a relatively short period of time. Their physical manipulation of the paint and their employment of colour and form have matured in step with their growing confidence in their own individual views of life.

The welcome involvement of the Dutch in the local arts scene brings with it new honours, the Belden op de Berg Foundation Awards for Distinction in painting and sculpture, which went to Chikonzero Chazunguza for *Becoming Myself* and to Joseph

Muzondo for *Wild Horse* respectively.

Another work by Chazunguza which caught my eye was *Beijin Blues*. Quite how the title relates I'm not sure but his use of traditional dry grass brushes to create intriguing and satisfying objects is an interesting new departure. Gerry Dixon recently used mutsvairo as part of a dramatic burning performance piece, *Para Noire*, and as a new material it seems to offer multiple and perhaps particularly African directions.

one young sculptor who has internalised in his own way the lessons in movement, weight and energy revealed by the master, Arthur Azevedo, whose striding *Secretary Bird* is a personality captured.

Upstairs, *Old Giraffe Man* by Stanley Matengwa moves with angular elegance and gentleness, supported by his stick, simple, with long leaning neck, wise, pale, watchful — a quiet presence reminding us of the inter-relation of human and animal spirits that is so much a part of our local philosophical heritage. This work is alive with its own life. Too many of the other exhibited sculptures remain, for me, merely shaped, untransformed lumps of stone.

In one patch of our 'heritage' is abstract work by Simon Back, his *Harare Evening* a finely articulated balance of line, form and colour, and the minimalist *Folk* (sic) by Gareth Fletcher with its intriguing illusion. And in another patch is *Comrades' War* by Norman Mhondiwa with its astonishing colour and naive-style detail and *Mobile African Village Ark* by Dexter Nyamainashe, an extended and intricate version of the popular push-along wire toys. It is an interesting exercise to look carefully at all the patches that make up our communal cloak.

This 1996 Heritage is confirmation of the variety of talent in Zimbabwe, and perhaps most obviously it reveals, in many of the less successful works, the potential for development. We may have trouble sorting out our 'heritage' but our future is all around us, waiting to happen. Once again we are indebted to Mobil and Anglo-American for their continuing support to the visual arts in Zimbabwe and special gratitude is due to Roy Lander who for so many years has been the enabling force behind a multitude of worthwhile cultural projects in dance, literature, music and the visual arts (including *Gallery* magazine). *Barbara Murray*



**Simon Back,
*Harare Evening***



**Hilary Kashiri,
*Commuter Rank II***



**Shepherd Mahufe,
*Carry Food***



**Gareth Fletcher,
*Folk***



Lizard by Harry Mutasa is a successful rendition of reptilian spirit — the alertness, the aggressive head, the rigid toes, the cold eye, yet that wide belly longing to slump and spread in the sun. Mutasa is



Norman Mhondiwa, *Comrades' War*

Dexter Nyamainashe, *Mobile African Village Art*

Reviews of recent work



Playground 'sculptures' by Nichola Henshaw, Crispen Matekenya, Kate Arnold and Keston Beaton, Blakiston School, Harare

Two British and two Zimbabwean artists have spent eight weeks working in situ at Blakiston Primary School making a climbing frame, chairs, benches, stools and other items for the children's playground. First, in a workshop with the artists, the children were invited to draw and paint figures from their own imaginations, their stories and myths. Using the children's drawings as the source for designs, the artists then carved and painted wood, and laid mosaics, creating an environment of fantastical shapes, vibrant colours, surprising objects and fun furniture.

The climbing frame is a combination of poles by all four artists, each adding his or her own individual style. A multitude of animals, human beings and other creatures twine and cavort around the frame inviting the children to join them in a magical game.

Nichola Henshaw employs a musical theme to produce a delightful set of child-sized benches and tables in the form of guitars and other instruments.

Outstanding among the works is a chair by Crispen Matekenya. A great fish, rising up over six feet tall, provides a seat in the curve of its powerful, scale-covered body and a backrest against its tail — a ride to carry one on an imaginary journey.

One of the children from Blakiston School described the playground as a desert before the artists arrived. "Now we need more time to play." *Barbara Murray*



Michiel Dolk, *Seascape* (details)

Barbara Murray

Michiel Dolk, *Seascape*, Royal Netherlands Embassy, Harare
Zimbabweans, forget all that talk about this being a landlocked country. We now have our very own coastline.

Thirty-two pieces of beautifully coloured marble installed in front of the Royal Netherlands Embassy in Harare provide us with a marine experience. Each is a subtle beach scene with softly lapping waves, pale sands washed and moved by the flow of tides, grey sea stretching out to a distant horizon.

To stand in the middle and slowly turn around the circle is to be on some lonely beach, a fortuitously placed palm tree adding to the illusion. This is nature imitating nature; nature painting her own seascape — discovered, cut, smoothed, polished and placed by Michiel Dolk for our contemplation.

The Royal Netherlands Embassy is to be congratulated for commissioning this lovely work of art. Perhaps some of the other embassies will consider commissioning out further gardens thus supporting local artists. Enabling both locals and visitors to appreciate art.

Barbara Murray

forthcoming events and exhibitions

Gallery Delta will be having its **Summer Show** in December/January. There is a lot of change and movement taking place with artists — visitors, travellers and others who have not shown before at Delta — bringing in interesting work. The show will include, amongst others, paintings by two British artists, **Maryclare Foa** and **Martin Beresford**, heliographs by American **Lawrence Beck**, and ceramics by Zambian **Andrew Macromalis**. Following on in January is the annual **Students and Young Artists Exhibition**, a chance to see burgeoning talent locally as well as work by Zimbabwe students studying art externally **Suzy Pennington** and **Helen Kedgley** from New Zealand will be exhibiting recent paintings and textiles in March.

An exhibition of work by **Piet Mondrian**

will open at the National Gallery in Harare on 4 February. Children's work will also be on show in February: peace posters and work submitted for a calendar. In March, the Genesis exhibition from Munsterland, Germany, with work by **Luis Meque**, **Keston Beaton** and **Tapfuma Gutsa** along with three German artists, **Jupp Ernst**, **Peer Christian Stuwe** and **Felix Droese**, will arrive. *Gallery no 6* ran an article on this exhibition which was well received in Germany. And opening on 18 March is a solo show of paintings and graphics by one of our prominent young artists, **Hilary Kashiri**.

An **international workshop** will be held at Sandro's during January which will encompass ceramics, glass, sculpture and painting and include Zimbabwean, Dutch, Danish and English artists. People are

invited to watch the artists at work as well as see their finished pieces at the end of January. Photographs and paintings by **Robbie Small** will be exhibited in February.

The National Gallery in Bulawayo will be holding the **10th VAAB Exhibition** during December and January. This annual event is a showcase for Matabeleland's top artists. Thereafter the national **Heritage Exhibition** will be on display.

Installation work by **Tapfuma Gutsa** will be on show at Pierre Gallery in January. This will be followed by an exhibition of wood sculpture, including work by **Zephania Tshuma**; and later a group show of paintings, including work by **Barry Lungu**.



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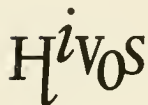
Gallery

The art magazine from Gallery Delta

No 11

Sponsoring art for Zimbabwe

Gallery Delta, the publisher and the editor gratefully acknowledge the following sponsors who have contributed to the production of this issue of *Gallery* magazine:



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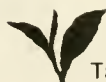


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Cover: Tendai Gumbo, vessel, 1995, 25 x 20cm, terracotta, coiled
and pit-fired (photo credit: Jack Bennett & Barbara Murray)

Left: Crispin Matekenya, *Baboon Chair*, 1996, 160 x 110 x 80cm,
wood

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Publisher: Derek Huggins. Editor: Barbara Murray. Design & typesetting:
Myrtle Mallis. Origination: HPP Studios. Printing: A.W. Bardwell & Co.
Paper: Magno from Graphtec Ltd.

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editor. Articles are invited for submission. Please address them to The
Editor.

Subscriptions from Gallery Publications, c/o Gallery Delta, 110 Livingstone
Avenue, P.O. Box UA 373, Union Avenue, Harare, Zimbabwe.
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Artnotes

One of the reasons for Europe and North America's dominance in the art world is the wide range of stringent criticism that surrounds art in those countries. Art, curators, galleries, arts bodies, as well as the critics, are constantly under scrutiny in newspapers, magazines, in lectures at universities and conferences, on TV and radio. As a result, informed debate is generated. Art becomes public knowledge and art criticism contributes to development and to the quality of life.

But in Africa art criticism is sorely lacking. In November last year, Zimbabwe, Nigeria and South Africa sent delegates to a conference on Art Criticism & Africa at the Courtauld Institute, London, organised by the British section of the International Association of Art Critics (AICA). Of the 61 national branches of AICA, only three are in Africa! The aims of the conference were to investigate the critical culture in Zimbabwe, Nigeria and South Africa, and to encourage the formation of local branches of AICA.

The first session of the conference, 'Art Criticism of Africa outside Africa', featured representatives of those exiles from Africa whose role in nudging and irritating the West into recognising art from Africa should not be underestimated. However, they have lived outside Africa for a long time and now have an identity crisis. Gavin Jantjes, originally from South Africa, admitted as much when he spoke of 'a rear-view mirror' and of problems in separating the motherland itself from the exile's idea of the motherland. Olu Oguibe, originally from Nigeria, painted a grim view of freedom of expression in Africa saying "*healthy criticism is impossible in Africa*" and "*there is no culture of excellence in Africa*". George Shire, a Zimbabwean exile, defined criticism as a political act and spoke of the need to decolonise art criticism in Zimbabwe.

The second session, 'The Art Critic as Advocate', moved on to views from participants who live in Africa and know the realities. The tone became less theoretical and surprisingly more hopeful. Murray McCartney highlighted the massive potential of the media in promoting art and pointed incisively to examples of wide-spread existing disinterest, self-censorship and lethargy. Tony Mhonda defined Zimbabwe as "*an a-critical society*", spoke of the need for grassroots education, condemned *Gallery* as a minority, magazine and went on to berate Zimbabwean critics for being elitist. Chika Okeke revealed that Nigeria, despite its trenchant political repression, has a more

healthy critical environment than Zimbabwe. He argued that art criticism is not an 'either—or' phenomenon; that "*all critical enterprise in whatever mode or medium aims at virtually the same goal — a fuller articulation and appreciation of art.*" He spoke about the importance of popular and oral criticism emphasising that criticism can be accommodating rather than divisive and that inclusivity of viewpoints is essential. He later described a marvellous-sounding annual event in Nigeria — the Art Stampede. This is an informal social occasion for artists and critics from all the arts. One or two people make speeches but the essence of the event is to interject, to question, to create an open, free-for-all atmosphere and exchange of views.

The third session looked at political and administrative effects on art criticism. Once again the comparative strength of Nigeria was obvious. Ola Olodi, critic and art historian at the University of Nsukka, examined the growth of criticism in Nigeria explaining that it sprang from colonial sources but that it has evolved into a "*tradition that can be considered dynamic and promising*". He emphasised "*the importance of an indigenous art-critical culture and the need for an internationalist inside-out and not outside-in critical attitude.*" Fatima Afifi, director of AICA-Egypt, gave evidence of the integrating potential of AICA which, because of its independence, can transcend divisions and combat political and cultural pressures on art. Colin Richards, a lecturer from Wits University, explained that art criticism does not have a firm base in South Africa; that there is no specialist art journal and that critical discourse remains "*both rarefied and underdeveloped*". He said that in the 'new South Africa' facilities and possibilities are more evenly distributed throughout the races.

This point was forcefully contradicted by the South African artist and curator, David Koloane, in the fourth session. Koloane, speaking on the topic 'Art Criticism for Whom?' said things have not changed. The power remains with the white establishment and "*there is a need for a common sensibility to tackle the problems confronting both black and white artists.*" This is similar to Zimbabwe where art criticism had a white source and access has remained limited. In both colonial and post-independence cultural policy art is dismissed as entirely superfluous. With minimal art education, a disinterested government and an unenlightened media, the little art criticism there is must target as many people as possible without compromising its

standards. Art criticism can, and in Zimbabwe it must, fulfill multiple roles as educator, promoter, recorder, supporter and catalyst. Despite its modest beginnings and some might say its colonial origins, *Gallery* attempts to reach as far as possible and with the recent sponsorship from HIVOS, *Gallery* is now going to all schools that teach A level art and to all public, community and rural libraries throughout the country.

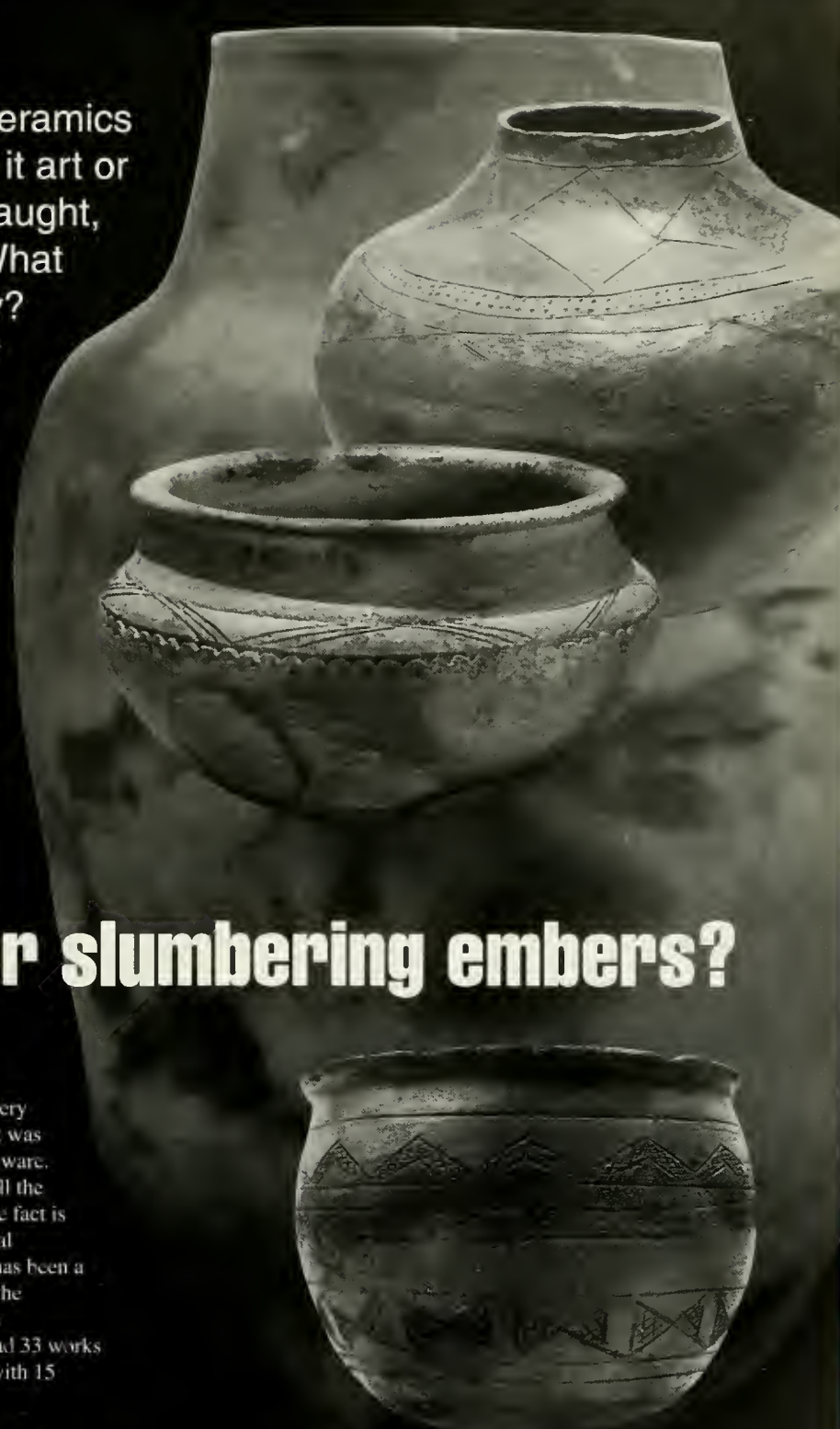
At the end of the conference I felt strongly that we must rely on ourselves and build on what we have. Matthew Arnold said "*I am bound by my own definition of criticism: a disinterested endeavour to learn and propagate the best that is known and thought in the world.*" He also said: "*The great aim of culture [is] the aim of setting ourselves to ascertain what perfection is and to make it prevail.*" With 20th-century relativism we have gained greater tolerance. We recognise every individual's right to a personal version of 'perfection' but criticism challenges us to continually revise our version, not to rest on mediocrities but to keep looking in the hope that we might attain the best possible. It is not that there is some static definition of 'best' or 'perfection' but that we keep on analysing, looking and thinking.

In a work of art, the artist seeks the best expression of a facet of life. While every endeavour is to be welcomed, criticism exists to show up the perceived strengths and failings. The artist, curator, critic, indeed all of us, need to be honest enough to acknowledge failings if we intend to continue the search. Some decide to settle for mediocrity, that is their choice.

Critical practice in Africa continues to be dogged by politics, racism and colonialism. Our history has led to a mentality of fear and the suppression of criticism, where critics are misconstrued as enemies rather than seen as allies in that search for the best. The critics of colonial exploitation were harassed once just as the critics of dictatorial corruption are harassed now. They are however, thankfully, never silenced, or not for long. Time proves criticism (relatively!) right or wrong in a multitude of ways. What is important in the end is that criticism exists, inviting people to reconsider and change. What Zimbabwe needs is more criticism. Perhaps an Art Stampede? Certainly a branch of AICA.

The Editor

What is the state of ceramics in Zimbabwe today? Is it art or craft? Is it being taught, made, shown, sold? What is its kind and quality? Potter, lawyer, former chairman of the National Gallery of Zimbabwe, Jack Bennett, conducts a survey of local ceramics and finds there are more questions than answers.



Burning fires or slumbering embers?

In 1992 an impressive 27 potters packed 204 works into the main space of the National Gallery of Zimbabwe for an exhibition of ceramics. It was a feast of studio pottery and open-fired earthenware. Granted this was a special for ceramics, with all the potters invited and all entries accepted. But the fact is that, since then, there has been no other national exhibition specifically for ceramics and there has been a marked decline in entries and acceptances for the ceramics section in the judged annual Heritage exhibitions. In the 1993 Heritage 12 potters had 33 works accepted; but in 1996 only 6 potters managed with 15 works. Why the drop?

It seems in part to be due to misunderstandings between potters and selectors. The selectors complained of lack of originality and rejected many entries, saying that they could see little fresh work coming from established potters. The potters, or some of them, claimed the selectors were usually painters or sculptors, unfamiliar with the medium, and that at times they showed cultural bias. With no qualified ceramic selectors for the Heritage, no other national show of ceramics and few alternative opportunities for exhibiting, the potters lost interest. Why are there so few exhibitions of pottery in Zimbabwe?

But exhibiting may not be the main force to spur the creation of ceramics. After all, potters produce to earn a living. This certainly applies to the traditional area and here it seems that life is more of a struggle than ever.

Monica Guta, *Gate* (for beer brewing, Nyanga District), 1982, 89 x 52cm, terracotta, coiled and pit-fired (photo credit: Jack Bennett)

(inset top) (Potter unknown), *Chirongo* (for water or beer storage), 40 x 50cm, terracotta, coiled and pit-fired

(inset middle) (Potter unknown), *Hadyana* (for serving relish), 14 x 23cm, earthenware, coiled and pit-fired

(inset below) (Potter unknown), *Chirongo*, 27 x 30cm, terracotta, coiled and pit-fired. (Photo credits all Dave Hartung, except where indicated.)



(1) Mary-Ann Soltau, vessel, 1997, 31 x 21cm, terracotta, coiled, kiln and pit-fired

(2) Sue McCormick, vessel, c.1988, 32 x 17.5cm, earthenware, coiled, kiln and pit-fired, with leather

(3) Frouwke Viewing, *Dappled Sandy Vase*, 1995, 33 x 15cm, porcelain, reduction fired

(4) Carole Wales-Smith, vessel, 1980s, 22 x 12cm, stoneware

(5) Violet Ndoro Tagurira, vessel, c. 1982, 21 x 38cm, terracotta, coiled and (probably) pit-fired

(Photo credits: Dave Hartung)

Pat Melville-Thompson, former teacher of ceramics at Chisipite School and Harare Polytechnic, with an enduring interest in rural pottery, fears this traditional art is in danger of disappearing. Not only is the ceramic vessel being replaced by plastic or metalware, certainly among urban users and even in the rural areas, but more seriously, the teaching of pottery-making skills is dying in the villages. Formerly mothers taught their daughters but now only old women toil at the burdensome task of fetching and preparing clay for patient coiling and firing in the time-honoured way. Besides, the lure of producing for the tourist market is strong, so that Batonka potters, for example, are now more inclined to meet foreigners' tastes for oil-painted vases and stereotyped animal figurines than to produce the vessels of old.

Those traditional pots, with their various specific uses and sizes, shapes and decorations, with styles evolved over centuries and distinguishing regional features, imbued with meaning and often mystery, are hard to find. Tall, grain-storing, beer-brewing *gates*, decorated only with the random black markings of the firing process, and squat, water-carrying *chirongos*, with perhaps a naturally stained red and black chevroned neck and burnished body, are still made and kept for ceremonial occasions. Will their styles change, affecting the timelessness of their beauty? Not likely, says Pat Melville-Thompson, given the deep-seated cultural tradition combined with the limitations of the clay bodies and firing techniques. But the smaller traditional vessel, the domestic utensil or container, like the *chikari* for cooking meat or vegetables, the *mhiya* for serving relish, the *chipfuko* or beer mug, are sadly but understandably being replaced by the more readily available and often more practical metal or plastic substitutes.

And what of the more formal teaching of ceramics in Zimbabwe? The only institution offering a structured course in ceramics is the



**Estelle Zimi, *Duck*, 1987,
13 x 19 x 16cm, terracotta,
hand-built and pit-fired**

**Lena Chingono, *Goat*, 1986,
41 x 34 x 20cm, terracotta,
hand-built and pit-fired**

Harare Polytechnic. The subject is taught at National Certificate and Diploma levels with a practical orientation. Whilst different techniques of forming, decorating and firing are imparted, the emphasis is on those that do not require unusual or expensive equipment and materials. Thus, the courses are geared around terracotta clay, sawdust and pit-firing and transparent glazes. It is felt that this better equips the students to continue on their own after completing their studies.

These forced but sensible restrictions clearly demonstrate the need for the Regional School of Art and Design, that ambitious project devised by the National Gallery of Zimbabwe, which looks as though it may remain stuck on the drawing board. Whilst a very few of the larger schools are equipped with pottery-making gear, they lack the qualified and innovative teachers whom the School of Art and Design was intended to produce.

Does all this mean that the future of formal ceramic teaching and creation is bleak? Alison Brayshaw, who taught last year's ceramics courses at Harare Polytechnic, sees hope in some of her students who are currently attending courses overseas on grants, who will pass on their knowledge when they return. Also encouraging is that the last three years' students who completed the National Diploma in Fine Art have produced some exciting and innovative ceramics. Tendai Gumbo, with her torn forms, and Mary-Ann Soltau, with her abstract drawing applied to pit-fired vessels, are showing particular talent. And current Polytech students are working on a project which looks at traditional pottery, combining pot-making with research into social and cultural values.

Meanwhile the stream of hand-made, hand-decorated, domestic and functional ware continues to flow from workplaces varying in size from the small single-potter studio to the larger 40-staff potteries. All is made with great care and labour, and most with fine craftsmanship. What decides what is made? Well, the market of course, and this is where the maker's integrity as artist or craftsperson is put to the stiffest test.

The demand from tourists, foreign buyers and locals is great. Estelle Zimi, until her recent illness, sold her large terracotta vessels and animal forms to eager collectors, as do Johane and Susan Marimo with their figures. Nicola Bryce of Ros Byrne Pottery in Msasa says they often cannot keep up with the orders for their hand-thrown domestic stoneware, brightly decorated with fruit and flower designs. Similarly the unglazed candle holders and gold glazed animal objects from Umwinsidale Pottery and the wide range of subtly coloured functional

tableware and tiles from Sitra Pottery have a large market. Smaller Harare potteries such as those run by Marge Wallace and Alison Brayshaw produce highly individualistic ceramics with more abstract and modern decorative effects. In and around Bulawayo, Mzilikazi Pottery and Gwai River Pottery keep up their production of distinctive hand-made domestic ware, tiles and jars.

But is this art? Robin Hopper in his *Functional Pottery — Form and Aesthetic in Pots of Purpose* writes:

"There has been little written on the art of making functional pottery, perhaps because in the past making utilitarian wares has largely been viewed as a means to an end rather than an end in itself. In the contemporary art arena, pottery has been looked at as the poor cousin to painting and sculpture, in much the same way as the graphic arts were once viewed. Pottery is neither painting nor sculpture, although it has elements of both. It is significant that in many of the world's languages there is no word for 'art'. Art is the result which comes from the activity known as 'craft'. There may be good or bad art, the quality being largely dependent on the combination of skill, understanding, emotion and intent."

Ceramic art is about unique and individual creativity, which can show itself in myriad ways, in forms, in decoration, in sculptures, in conceptual or functional vessels. If we are looking at ceramics as an art form, and creativity as its inspiration, how would we rate the state of the art in Zimbabwe? Helen Lieros, artist and co-owner of Gallery Delta says:

"We have the expertise but we do not experiment enough. The work is very classical, very beautiful, but I look at ceramics as sculpture and like to see potters exploring the form, destroying and re-creating it. We need more stimulation from outside, like we had from visiting Kenyan/British potter, Magdalene Odundo, and the New Zealanders Wi Taepa and Robyn Stewart; and the recent showing of work by Zambian Andrew Makromallis at Delta."

Multimedia artist Berry Bickle agrees, not surprisingly, considering her own fiery solo exhibition at Delta in November 1996, where porcelain slabs and bowls were incorporated into daring installations with mixed media works on paper. Bickle says:

"Our potters are very good but there is no obvious development. No one is extending ideas. In the traditional pottery, there is no progression and in the studio pottery, there is stagnation. We should take note

Stephen Williams, plate,
1985, 22cm diameter,
earthenware



Jack Bennett

of South African (former Zimbabwean resident) ceramicist Howard Minne, pushing the frontiers of the traditional African form in his huge sculptural pots, shown as prizewinners in the *National Ceramics Quarterly* magazine of South Africa."

Is there a valid meeting point between traditional and modern pottery, between African and European ideas, feelings, expressions, cultures? Violet Ndoro Tagurira using the traditional African terracotta and pit-fired methods produced strong, simple, classical vessels. Tendai Gumbo has also combined the more European forms with the strength and earthiness of the African style. Mary-Ann Soltau and some other potters have been experimenting in this direction. Gumbo's most recent work, a group of terracotta, pit-fired items, draws on Ndebele funerary traditions but includes some abstract human forms in the modern European idiom. Carole Wales-Smith has consistently developed her ring-necked vessels inspired by African body ornaments. Sue McCormick has explored forms using unglazed clay and leather in designs evolved from gourds, rocks, seeds and other objects of the African landscape.

Does there have to be a meeting point and can there be one that happens naturally? Can older potters change their styles, and should they? It is said that pottery forms lend themselves to infinite variety, so that even the bowl and the bottle, those two basic forms which have been shaped by the world's civilisations since time immemorial, have never been exhausted. So, despite the ingenuity of thousands, perhaps millions, of potters nurtured by numerous diverse cultures, ancient and modern, eastern and western, northern and southern, there is no end to the variety of line, let alone decoration. Frouwke Viewing continues to produce subtle variations in her finely glazed porcelain bottles and bowls. Is there a future for this Anglo-Oriental studio pottery style, with its pure forms and muted colours, evolved by Hamada and Leach in the 30s and 40s, thereafter heavily influencing potters in Britain, America and other countries?

Will the New Ceramics, which broke the Anglo-Oriental mould in those countries, set a new one now? Can the new free-form trials, the vivid colourings, the painterly/sculptural experiments, those products of post-war ceramic renaissances, make a style? There seems to be some unity in their diversity, the result of easy

communication, creating international resemblances. Should Zimbabwe become a part of this new movement and can we? Can we develop, or are we developing, a style of our own?

The earth form is perhaps the oldest and most traditional art form in Zimbabwean culture. The materials and processes are available and relatively cheap. Clay is limitlessly malleable and flexible, capable of responding to the unique expression of individuality; it has endless possibilities. Significantly experiments in ceramics in Zimbabwe have been carried out by painters and sculptors such as Stephen Williams, Voti Thebe, Simon Back and Berry Bickle. Is there a way forward?

Herbert Read wrote in his book *The Meaning of Art*:

"Pottery is at once the simplest and the most difficult of the arts. It is the simplest because it is the most elemental; it is the most difficult because it is the most abstract ... Judge the art of a country, judge the finest of its sensibility, by its pottery; it is a sure touchstone. Pottery is pure art; it is art freed from any imitative intention."



Jack Bennett

Simon Back,
Acrobat,
1992, 25 x 15cm,
stoneware

Many of Zimbabwe's young artists slide too easily into the carelessness of abstraction, relying on luck to provide a passable combination. Barbara Murray writes about one artist who offers an outstanding example of creative control and integrity



The perceptive eye and disciplined hand: Richard Witikani

"Myself I just paint because I like to paint. It's just a pleasure. I just enjoy it. And you are there to judge if you like it or not."

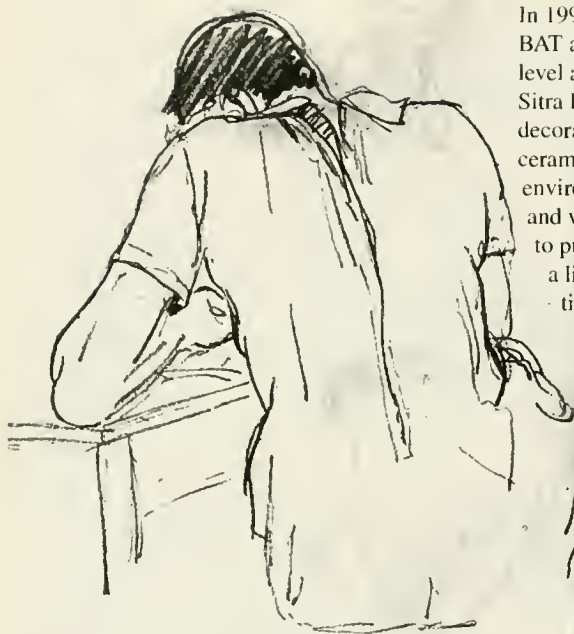
This honest directness is something one rarely gets from an artist in 1997. It belies the dedication with which Richard Witikani pursues his desire to paint and, in its modesty, it downplays the achievements of this fine young artist.

Richard Witikani lives and works in the countryside east of Harare. Apart from two years of his life, he has always lived in a rural environment and recognises it as the source of his art. He was born in Wedza on the 1st January 1967, his father Malawian, a tractor driver, and his mother, Zimbabwean. Both his primary and secondary education were at local rural schools culminating at St Vincent's in Nora, "where I first met people who were interested in art".

From the age of 13, Witikani had been fascinated by photographs in newspapers which he studied and copied. "Then that got boring so I tried something more challenging, drawing a person in front of me." Taking the people around him as subjects, Witikani quickly developed considerable drafting skills as well as a sense of form and composition. His talent was noticed by a teacher at St Vincent's who began to encourage him and enabled him to take art for ZJC which he passed, despite there being no art classes and no art teacher, with a distinction. Level-headed and intelligent, Witikani achieved good results in all his O level subjects whereon his parents suggested that he do office work of some kind. Witikani however, with quiet determination and the help of his teacher, got a place at the National Gallery's BAT Workshop in 1988. At the time Martin van der Spuy and subsequently Kate Raath were the instructors who nurtured Witikani's



Richard Witikani, *Woman with Flowers*, 1996, 95 x 78cm, oil on paper



In 1990, having completed his studies at BAT and gained an A for both O level and A level art, Witikani decided to take a job at Sitra Pottery where he continues to work at decorating domestic and functional ceramics. Thus he moved back to a rural environment in which he feels most at ease and where he hoped to have time and space to pursue his own painting as well as earn a living. Inevitably there is not enough time. Witikani sketches every day but he has only his daily lunch hour and then his weekends to sketch and paint. His job at the pottery has, however, freed him from the damaging necessity of having to earn money through his art, the circumstance which degrades the talent of many Zimbabwean artists and turns them into commercial painters producing what they know will sell.

ability and inclination towards life drawing using pencil and watercolour, and although he enjoyed various other media such as litho, screenprinting and sculpture, drawing from the human figure remained his first choice.

In order to pay for his living expenses during his second year at BAT, Witikani took a morning teaching post at Girls' High. This he says was *"a bit boring. As an artist you need to be in your own home, experimenting every day. If you are teaching you are not doing your own work."* To alleviate the boredom Witikani did quick sketches of the students while they worked. The speed with which these must have been done emphasises his ability to catch the curve, express the volume, select the indicative detail. There is no superfluous line or dot and little if any alteration — evidence of a perceptive eye and a disciplined hand.

Sitra Pottery is situated away from the main road along several miles of dirt track, through rolling grasslands interspersed with woodlands and rocky outcrops. Following Witikani to the workers' village along a path through darkly green trees, one comes out into an open area, a kopje burgeoning with rounded boulders and leafy bushes to the left, a valley of pale dry grass falling away to the right. The pink earth path spreads, divides and wanders unevenly between scattered assorted dwellings, some mud and thatch, some brick and thatch, others with tin roofs; grass fences, a few banana trees, some chickens scratching in the dust, washing draped between two poles. A woman sits in the shade with a child on her lap, two others stand nearby at a tap gossiping. A child rambles along with a wire car. Further away a woman bends and hoes a patch of vegetables. Sun and shadow create volume and colour. It is like walking into one of Witikani's paintings ... daily life going on in

an unhurried way — women doing their everyday chores, preparing food, sweeping, looking after home and children, with their share of problems and pleasures. *"I want to paint how people are, what they are doing. I paint people and nature, how people live in their environment."*

Going into Witikani's studio, a traditional mud and thatch hut without windows, the light from the doorway falls on a pile of paintings on heavy brown paper heaped one on top of another on the floor, wood for frames leaning against a wall, boxes of tubes and brushes, some bottles of turps, and a collection of sketchbooks. Those books — pencil drawings, page after page of quick free sketches of people done in the pottery, in the village, at home over weekends when friends come to talk with his wife, at local markets, bus stops, clinics, or drawings of the roadside, the boulders and trees. *"I sketch from my surroundings. These are the people I stay with so when they are there I get time to sketch them."*

From these pencil lines, from the concentrated and continual looking at the human figure and the landscape, the paintings are composed. Once he faces the large sheet of brown paper with his brushes and paints, Witikani is free to cut, combine, create his own version of everyday life and it is here that his unerring sense of composition takes over.

Richard Witikani's preoccupation is the human form, more particularly the female form. The majority of his paintings are of women, either alone or in small groups, placed centrally within the format; some look directly at the viewer, others turn aside; some are talking, but most are caught up in private thought. They are often passive, sitting, lying, waiting for someone.

(above) Richard Witikani, student at Girls' High School from a sketchbook, 1989

Richard Witikani, from sketchbooks



Witikani says, "Women's bodies are more interesting to paint. In women, you have curves, round forms, heaviness." But there is no prettification. These are not subjects chosen for sentimental or decorative potential but for their natural and real humanity. The treatment is broad and direct, imbued with the artist's understanding and respect which in turn creates a strong presence in each of his subjects. Witikani seeks to capture the existing, the nature of the female body in its variety and universality. Many paintings feature a single woman, preoccupied in her solitariness, such as *Desdymona* and *Knitting*. In others, the bond of mother and child is strongly portrayed by an interweaving and visual combining of the two interdependent forms, as in *Hunger*. Indeed in some works, for example in *Paying Attention*, the body of the small child only becomes apparent and distinguishable on careful looking.

There are also a number of paintings involving two or three figures. The natural groupings and interrelation of the people is again expressed in the proximity and the rhythm of their bodies. For example in *Hairdresser I*, the three heads are inclined towards each other; the child, mother and sitter are encompassed in one of several circles creating this closely integrated composition. The hands of the mother link with the hair and head of the sitter; the curve of the mother's body absorbs the roundness of the child on her back.

Witikani disposes the weights of the bodies and limbs in order to produce a dynamic within the compositions. Triangles can be discerned in many paintings creating visual movement and energy despite their sedentary subjects. Although the brushwork is free and appears spontaneous, the forms are firmly and clearly depicted, due no doubt to the painter's skill at drawing and his understanding of line. The weight of the bodies, sturdy legs and feet, and at times the whole prone body as in *Siesta*, press firmly on the ground or seat. This is not a superficial rendering but a physically felt experience of the body. The hands and arms and particularly shoulders speak of ability and strength. The faces possess patience, acceptance, and though soft and vulnerable, portray endurance.

These robust women seem unconsciously composed, as if they are naturally and solidly there, regardless of the painter, indifferent to the viewer. Only in the *Reclining Nude* is there a consciousness of the observing artist and the posed subject. The woman is unable to take pride in her voluptuous body. This work is based on an early life drawing done by Witikani while still at the BAT Workshop. It has been transformed into sumptuous paint, skillfully done, and clearly reveals the artist's pleasure in the female curves.



Barbara Murray



Barbara Murray

(top) Richard Witikani, *Hunger*, 1996, 109 x 84cm, gouache on paper

(above) Richard Witikani, *Hairdresser I*, 1996, 89 x 71cm, oil on paper

Richard Witikani,
Waiting at the Clinic,
1996, 71 x 88.5cm,
oil on paper



Barbara Murray

Richard Witikani's work is free of any unnecessary detail. The figure or figures are placed within a simple background and the painting is built around an intuitively worked interplay of horizontals, verticals, diagonals, triangles or circles. The internal rhythm is always strong, smooth and resonant. There are few straight lines or geometric forms and where they exist they serve to contrast or enhance the volume, curve and presence of the subject, such as the wall in *Woman with Flowers* and *Waiting at the Clinic*. The rhythm in *Waiting at the Clinic* with the lines and volumes of the two outside figures leading the eye in, and the echoing shapes of heads, bodies and trees, creates a successful composition. Vertical or horizontal lines, in a wall, a tree, a chair, stabilise the subject and sometimes define or frame a space, for example in *Hunger* and in *Paying Attention*. The surrounds and background are always well integrated and used to enhance the main subject. Depth is naturally indicated with no exaggerations or pretensions. There is no romantic excess anywhere. There is no falsification. Treatment of background and foreground are handled in the same way and both negative and positive shapes are given eloquence. The relation of all these elements to the whole creates the unity of structure and vision which is essential to a good work of art.

And perhaps the strongest integrating force is colour. Its use and control is central to Witikani's method and expression. He makes no colour notes in his sketches and freely applies his visual imagination when working on a painting. Colours relate to other colours in the composition rather than to any outside reality. With strong,

in which the colours are distributed across the space. Light is seen in terms of colour as are shadow and volume.

For the viewer, often the first impression is of coloured patches which then resolve into subject. Intuitively and boldly placed blobs and strokes of colour re-form into flesh and cloth; broad homogenous areas create solids in space. Colour is used in the clothing to emphasise the covered body shapes, shadows and highlights creating volume and line. Occasionally a single line is employed to delineate form but more often shape is created by colour. Colour is also used to decorative effect in the clothing. In *Woman with Flowers*, this decorative element, a mass of flowers on a dark bush, creates the background for a woman whose blouse links her indissolubly with her surroundings. Note the use, in many of the works, of the same or a tonally related colour in the background and foreground of a painting, once again integrating the different elements into a cohesive whole.

Colour is, as well, used expressively to conjure atmosphere, the emotion of the scene — in *Backdoor Saloon*, a city scene, it is bright, bold, noisy, scattered; in *Hunger*, it is dull, leached, pale, sucked out as is the woman's breast.

There is a boldness in Witikani's use of colour and a simplicity, with usually only three or perhaps four colours making up the palette of a single painting. They are chosen according to the subject, the composition and their interactive relationship within the painting. At times the bare brown surface is employed, and, so successful is its integration, that a closer look is needed to confirm that it is in fact unpainted paper.

This intelligent use of colour may give one the impression that Witikani is painting from reality, but the cohesion and delight of the colour in his work springs from his visual imagination and has lessons for those Zimbabwean artists who splash on colours with no consideration of their effect or function.

The landscapes on show present a convincing evocation of place. Again sparing on detail, cohesive in composition and simple in subject, they however offer a rich play of colour, deviating from reality in more painterly ways. In particular *The Red Tree* is vibrant and dynamic with its dark turbulent sky and wind-rushed grass. These works are in fact largely imaginative compositions founded only on Witikani's intimate knowledge of the countryside which he inhabits, expressing personal mood as well as capturing the essential atmosphere of place and season. Paintings of the village environment focus on the closeness of man to nature and are taken from sketches. Witikani sees both as equal partners. "I enjoy the unity of the people to the land. We live in the land. Man and nature are very close. It is quite simple. Man affects nature and nature affects man." Life in the rural areas is presented in a straightforward manner; it is not sweetened or romanticised; neither is it denigrated.

There is a strength and consistency about Richard Witikani's work. His obvious knowledge of line and form, his rigorous structuring of composition, his honest choice of subject and his striking understanding of colour, all point to a major talent and a mature, independent vision.

The annual Heritage Exhibition at the National Gallery has for many years been an indicator of the state of the visual arts in Zimbabwe.

Anthony Chennells investigates and analyses the 1996 offering.

Confronting Complexity and Contradiction

Heritage is a word which offers a spurious sense of security.

People invoke their heritage only when the discernible movements between past and future are broken and the present no longer anticipates with any certainty what will come next. And yet the idea of heritage is comforting: it invokes a secure past amidst present instabilities and it is not surprising that the most fiercely reactionary institution in Washington should be called the Heritage Foundation or that the periodical devoted to white Zimbabwean history changed its name at Zimbabwe's Independence from *Rhodesiana* to *Heritage*. Instability implicit in the affirmation of stability, a defensive assertion of roots and belonging, provide a point of access to the art of this year's Heritage Exhibition at the National Gallery.

T.S. Eliot pointed out many years ago that each new individual work of art extends and modifies existing traditions and Zimbabwean art, because of the very nature of our society, shows the traces of numerous cultural traditions. Artists can respond to this in different ways: they can defiantly affirm the authenticity of one of those

cultural strands and insist that it is along that strand that Zimbabwe's true identity can be found. They can also confront Zimbabwe's cultural syncretism, the implications of the intersections of multiple traditions of ethnicity, race, geographical origin and class in our cultural life. When a painting or sculpture enacts this confrontation something more ambitious is being attempted than the recovery of an identity simplified to race or origin.

An anecdote from the opening of the exhibition may help to explain my meaning. I noticed a senior civil servant who is a socialist theorist of art standing with two diplomats from one of the few countries in the world which still claim to be socialist. They were clustered around Norman Mhondiwa's *Comrades War* and as I passed I heard one of them say, "This is real art."

The rural landscape of *Comrades War* is rendered with the self-conscious naivety which has become conventional in one genre of Zimbabwean painting. The thatched villages, granite boulders and scarlet leaves of brachystegia woodlands in spring provide a background not, as is usual in the genre, for the routines and multiple

Barbara Murray



Norman Mhondiwa, *Comrades War*, 1996, 81 x 125cm, oil on canvas

Barbara Murray



Norman Mhondiwa, *Thanking God for Harvest*, 1996, 81 x 125cm, oil on canvas

activities of village life but rather for an episode in the war. In the centre of the painting a crashed Rhodesian plane is in flames. Above two more aircraft are burning while others drop bombs and parachutes. In the foreground two women flee with an armed guerilla while two women in uniform fire towards the sky. Other civilian figures throughout the painting run in panic from the firing.

I assume that for the three viewers whose comments I overheard the purpose of art is to affirm our identity as a revolutionary people. Art in the service of revolution is central to the idea of socialist realism and in the armed struggle soldiers, proletarians and peasants provide the unity of the comrades of the title, the equal status of their shared humanity insisted upon in the art. The 'reality' which socialist art purports to depict is constructed by history: 'realism' is where the agents of a situation are shown playing out the roles which history has rendered typical of people of their class and time. At its most successful this theory of art produces the wonderful revolutionary murals of Maputo. This is not the static triumphalist art which is being dismantled in disgust all over Russia and Eastern Europe. Instead it includes anxiety, confusion and despair alongside hope and triumph as moments worth recording in Mozambique's Liberation War.(1)

When the three men had moved away I looked more carefully at the painting and wondered whether in their enthusiastic response to a painting which has as its subject peasants and war, they had noted that it was in fact subverting the conventions of socialist realism which I have briefly indicated. Only in its opposition of the humanity of the peasants to the dehumanised technology of the enemy is a conventional point registered. In other respects the painting refuses socialist-realist revolutionary pieties. The shooting down of aircraft from the sky was atypical in our war as it was in any other guerilla war — guerilla warfare is not

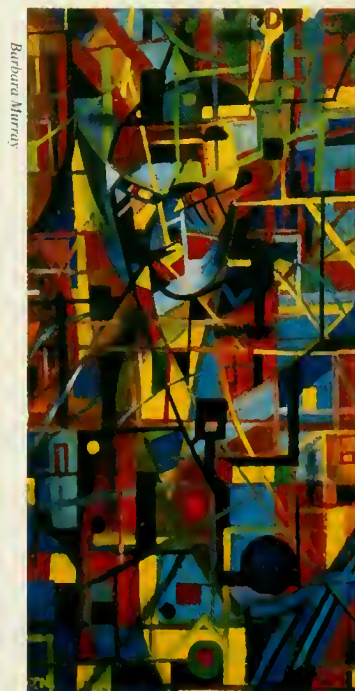
access to vastly superior technology. Mhondiwa's peasants, in flight all over the painting, appear to lack revolutionary firmness and only the fleeing women in the foreground are accompanied by a guerilla. Even more unexpected is the fact that only women guerillas fire back, a curious detail which allows gender differences to add another confusing element to the idea of a united front.

Why should I have spent such a long time on so obviously an inferior painting like *Comrades War*? One reason is because we are talking about heritage and how the Liberation War is recalled as a part of that heritage. The war must be understood as only one part (and because its methods and objectives are so obvious, the easiest part) of a revolutionary process. Frantz Fanon, the philosopher of revolutionary states of mind, who anticipated with eerie accuracy the tendencies of Africa's independent states, realised as early as 1961 that one way of repressing discontent after independence is to ignore present failure and instead to keep on recalling the liberation war itself. A leader will idealise and simplify the struggle and "[e]very time he speaks to the people he calls to mind his often heroic life, the struggles he has led in the name of the people and the victories in their name he has achieved." All this Fanon argues is to mystify and bewilder the masses so that while he "constitutes a screen between the people and the rapacious bourgeoisie," the people will "go on putting their confidence in him." (2) If this use of the past to justify present abuse is, as Fanon implies, an inevitable movement in post-colonial politics, that is all the more reason for artists to deal cautiously with their representations of the war itself. Whatever else our heritage consists of it should not include art which serves the distortions of propaganda.

As I have suggested I do not think that *Comrades War* can be simply dismissed as art serving the sanitized official memories of Zimbabwe for the details of the painting do not create a

single narrative whose end is ZANU(PF)'s triumph. Mhondiwa's other painting on the exhibition, *Thanking God for Harvest*, shows the complex effects his naive technique is capable of achieving. Here the community, unified in worship, is skilfully suggested in the repetition of faces in the lines of the worshipping group. The viewer's eye is directed towards two mbiras, the instrument which more even than the drums provides a ritual link between the Shona, the ancestors and God. The circle of the mbiras recalls the curves of the faces, the gathered faces are justified in the mbiras, and both are echoed in the curves of granite boulders: the community through its traditional ritualistic instruments is unified both with one another, with the land and with God. At the same time, there are people to whom the ceremony means nothing, and at the front of the painting a group gambles, oblivious of the ritual being enacted behind them.

Two other paintings on the exhibition suggest how art can be used to make different statements about politics — about who has public power and how it is used and abused. Every new painting one sees by Stephen Williams is an additional reason for mourning his untimely death and his *The Fall of the Sybarites* is no exception. Here a steel panel has apparently been scored across as if the shining surface has been vandalised. A longer look shows both red and rust which the scoring has uncovered. Williams had a Marxist background and the steel for me constitutes a visual pun on the associations between steel and dictatorships whether in the name of the proletariat or not: the claims to absolute authority, the purity of ideal political systems, inflexible determination, detachment from human weakness. As an aspirant dictator Joseph Djughashvili took as his *nom de guerre* Stalin — steel. Most socialist governments of this century justified authoritarianism by claiming to speak on behalf of the people whose historic destiny they were helping to fulfil; most, in the last decade, after their inevitable collapse, were shown to have been

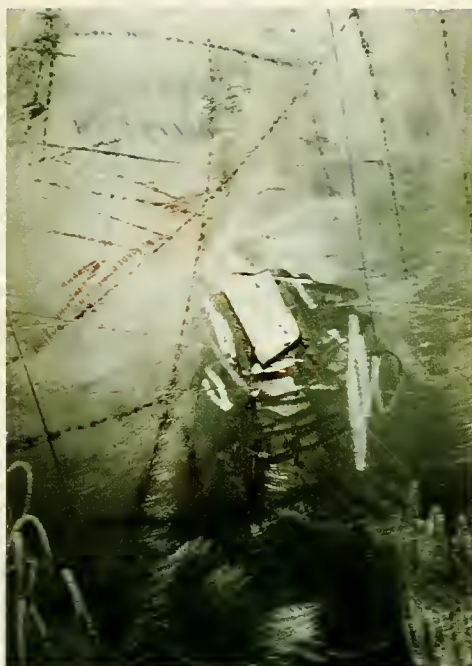


Julius Nyamubaya,
Portrait of a Streetkid, 1996,
90 x 45cm, oil on canvas

façades erected to conceal the corruption at the heart of their various systems. The graffiti-like scores suggest a popular anger which cuts through the façade to reveal, in rust and blood, political authority as self-serving and self-indulgent, as sybaritic in fact.

If Williams's painting is a general statement about political authority, Richard Witikani's *The News* is more local in its referents, which constitutes part of its strength. Witikani's drawing becomes more deft with each new painting and here it creates the heaviness of the legs of two male figures which dominate the left-hand side of the painting and which conveys a contradictory sense of bored idleness and virility. The figures have not been painted as an end in themselves as they have been in so much of his previous work. Instead they compete for attention with the headlines of the papers which the young men are reading with the white and black of the paper insisting on their equal status with the other colours of the painting. The news, however, does not distract with hope or purpose or, in our context of jobless youth, with promises of employment. Instead the headlines refer to AIDS as if the only news contained in the papers is a guarantee of despair. Other texts referring to feeding schemes and breast feeding are on the periphery of the painting suggesting that attention to the health of children is rendered futile by the AIDS pandemic. A poster inviting voters to support Margaret Dongo is dimly visible and I wonder whether this is intended to suggest any alternative political initiative has little meaning in the context of AIDS. Part of the painting's power derives from the way in which the various verbal texts are re-enforced through the tension between the masculine figures and a group of much less precisely drawn female figures to the right. Only one woman's eyes are turned half-invitingly towards the men — the rest look away. Beneath one of the men's shoes a newspaper headline announces with words that serve as an alternative title to the painting: "AIDS weakens the virile ones."

Barbara Murray



Stephen Williams, *Fall of the Sybarites* (detail), 1996, 150 x 121cm, mixed media

Barbara Murray



Richard Witikani, *The News* (detail), 1996, 102 x 183cm, oil on paper

Witikani takes his place alongside Fasoni Sibanda and Luis Meque as artists who have enabled us to see in a new way life in high density suburbs and communal lands. The insights which their art has offered us are now a part of our heritage in the most positive sense of the word. Hilary Kashiri stands beside them and can be seen to have developed the tradition which they have given rise to. His *Commuter Rank II* is a nightmare vision of the crowded inner city. There is little to console in the lurid colours and human figures are barely discernible. Squares and circles dominate referring to the shapes of the vehicles at the rank while at the same time suggesting a world dominated by technology so that urban humanity is largely alienated from itself. The idea of an alienating city is taken up in the more schematic *Portrait of a Street Kid* by Julius Nyamubaya where a person's head can be made out amidst a composition of lines and circles in colours which are glaringly artificial.

One of the more unattractive parts of Zimbabwe's visual inheritance is an art which attempted to interpret our landscapes in the conventions of the European romantic sublime. Often such paintings claim to be of Nyanga and they show blue-peaked mountains more alpine than African, lush green foregrounds and the inevitable red of musasa trees. Mercifully such paintings are excluded from this exhibition although, in a curious colonial distortion of how we see our world, black artists are beginning to peddle in the streets imitations of these mendacious accounts of the land. One of the many debts we owe to Robert Paul is that he explored, and many of his paintings accurately depict, both the colours and shapes of Nyanga. In this exhibition Paul Wade returns us to the particular range of our seasonal colours with his two oils *Seasonal Changes I* and *Seasonal Changes II*. In the first the earth at the end of a good rainy season provides a thin panel which divides the painting into two: on one side the colours of Zimbabwe's clear winter skies; on the other side the dust between the rains. Sky and



(above) Paul Wade, *Seasonal Changes I*, 1996, 150 x 246cm, oil on canvas

(middle) Paul Wade, *Seasonal Changes II*, 1996, 150 x 246cm, oil on canvas

(below) Maria Ndandarika, *Waiting in Vain*, 1996, approx 48 x 48 x 40cm, opalstone



earth dominate the canvas as they do our lives for so much of the year. In *Seasonal Changes II* Wade uses the same idea of vertical divisions as the basic construct of the painting. Here he adds to the natural tones, colours which have other culturally relative associations. The rainy season panel here moves from green and brown into brown, purple and pink which can be read as blossom or as the riches of the earth. This is followed by a lovely piece of painting of the sky, the rich blue paling at the edges as the winter sky does. This is replaced by the largest of all the panels where dust shades into earth colour before the concluding panel which is of deep red and blue, satisfyingly suggesting a concluding richness to this sequence.

Our oldest and most ubiquitous artistic inheritance is of course the rock paintings which appear throughout Zimbabwe's granite areas. A vague and distorted impression of them has been appropriated by the tourist trade to decorate batik and pottery but they have to my knowledge never been successfully used in serious art. In this exhibition, an attempted testimony to the early artists, is Obert Muringani's *Original Painters*. However much one welcomes the attempt, one has to see it as failure. Muringani has painted onto three pieces of hide, stitched together. That the original community of artists has been destroyed is suggested both in the torn hide and in the absence of any whole figures in the work for only human torsos are depicted together with the faint outline of a giraffe. This comment on the vanished artists remains at the level of affirmation rather than something which has been realised in the work itself. The original art with very few exceptions is an art which signifies through outline and in the way outlines relate to one another. Muringani has rejected the challenges of this technique by moulding the thigh, buttocks and breasts of his figures so they more closely resemble contemporary figure painting than the art which he implicitly claims as inspiration. There is always the possibility that I am missing the point and the

painting operates through an irony that allows echoes of the ancient and new art to compete in the viewer's imagination.

Perhaps we should not try to reproduce a vanished art especially one which is so obviously the product of a hunter-gatherer society. Coming from an infinitely more complex economic system, we cannot reproduce the spirit of the old art. The artist who more than any other on the exhibition enacts a confrontation with this multiply faceted economic present (if confrontation is not too strong a word for so gentle an artist) is Thakor Patel. His companion pieces *Summer Cloud* and *Winter Cloud* show him in a characteristically playful mood with an assortment of objects painted on the two canvases as if set up for a memory test. But because it is Thakor Patel controlling the images, the apparently random representations are located with a mathematical precision which is confirmed in the exactness of both the drawing and the way in which paint has been applied. The summer of the first painting is suggested in a Ndebele love-stick, brightly coloured beads being strung to cover the wood, a hint of a deck chair, kites and other mobiles flying, the sun-touched cloud of the title which is also half-curtain raised to reveal parallel lines which suggest the agricultural potential of a ploughed field. A panga blade glints with light. Cloud, field, sunlight may be natural objects and love a natural passion but Patel makes no attempt to register them realistically. In fact we see them as painted before we think of their literal referents. In the case of the love-stick, the key trope in the painting, we see it as artefact in the making before we register its associations. Similarly the lines at the bottom of the painting are noted as a frame before their alternative referent as ploughed field is recognised. In *Winter Cloud* the framing lines are now at the top of the painting suggesting ceiling boards and from them the kites and mobiles hang, disabled by the season. The clouds have the colour of the *guti* clouds of July although again they are draped like curtains and their artificiality is

further insisted upon in fasteners which secure the cloud-curtain folds — wittily suggesting the need to button-up against the cold. The button on the summer cloud is frivolously decorated with beading so that it is hardly functional as fastener. Only the blade of the panga is repeated. I have no objection to a didactic art — both *The News* and *Thanking God for Harvest* have didactic elements in them and they are the linear descendants of Shona oracy which sees its purpose in its capacity to correct and direct. But art can also satisfy by being reflexive, by considering the processes which have gone into its making. One aspect of that process for Zimbabwean painters is the influences which we are subject to and which Patel refers to: we know both Ndebele bead-work and the clean lines and colours with which David Hockney celebrates southern California's light and leisure. One recalls Klee and Miro in Patel's kites and mobiles but the colour of the soil, the winter and summer clouds are entirely Zimbabwean. The panga, that ambiguous instrument of violence and agriculture, denies the possibility of any simple response to either season.

Heritage if it is a positive concept must be about both the past and the future. Our younger artists will make a heritage for future generations but they will do that only if they retain a creative integrity in the face of the demands of the market place. We all know what has happened to our stone sculpture: endless, increasingly inferior reproductions of once brilliant ideas so that even in the National Gallery one greets with mistrust each carved stone one comes across.(3) It was only after several visits to the exhibition that I recognized how superbly Maria Ndandarika's *Waiting In Vain* manages to convey a sense of anticipation, resignation and despair with an extraordinary economy of line. In every interior-decorating shop in Harare we see the insulting attempts to copy Arthur Azevedo's metal sculptures. Stiff birds in black-painted metal, hammered into uniformity so that the very notion of 'scrap' is lost, bear as much relation to Azevedo's



Dami Deudney



Dami Deudney

(above) Thakor Patel, *Summer Cloud*, 1996, 91 x 57.5cm, watercolour

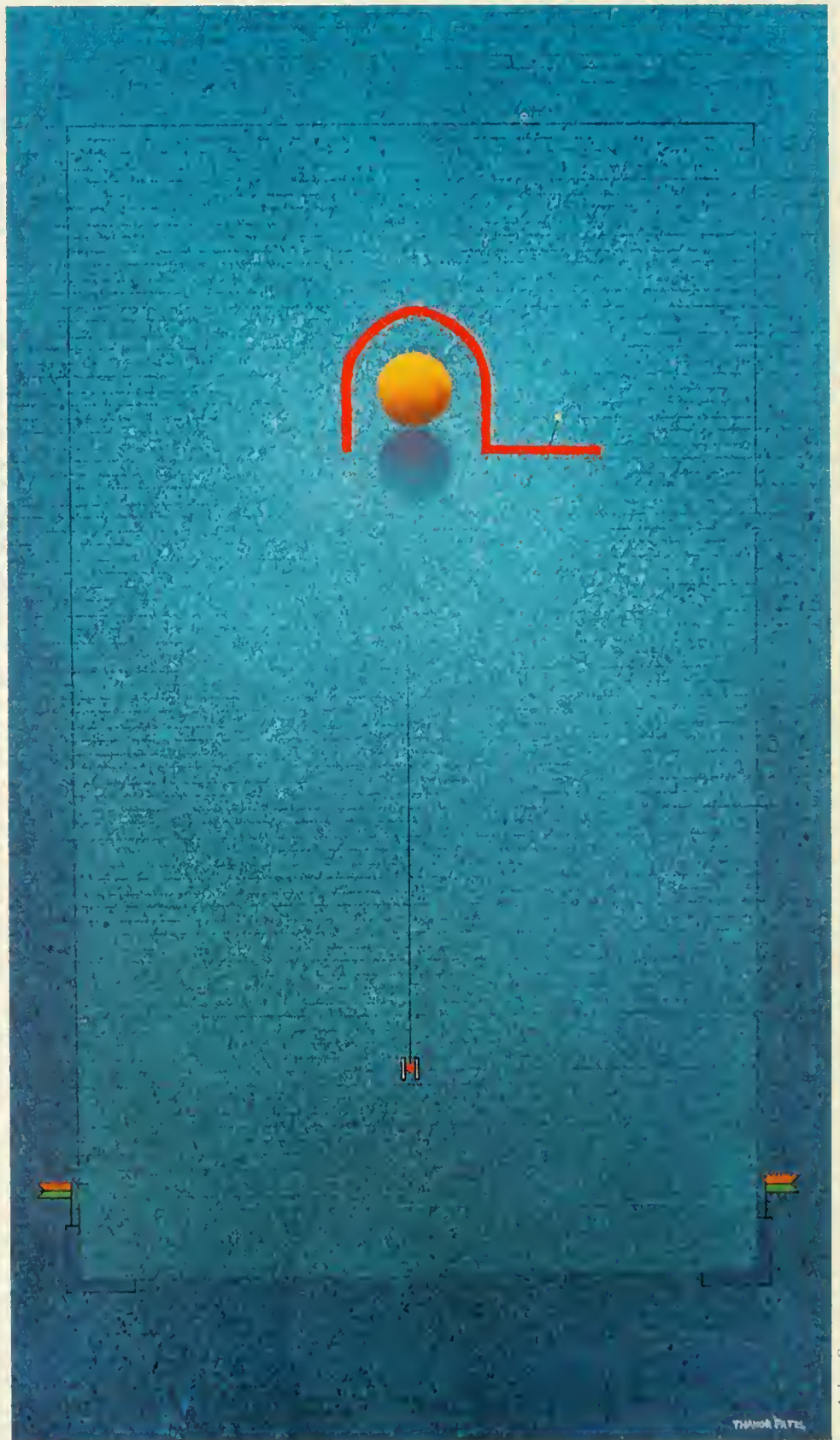
(below) Thakor Patel, *Winter Cloud*, 1996, 91 x 57.5cm, watercolour

exploration of the shape and movement of bird and beast as a feather duster represents an ostrich. Harry Mutasa's *Pregnancy Pain* shows, however, that there are exciting young sculptors around. There is no attempt to disguise the scrap which has gone to the making of the figure and the pain of the title is suggested as much by the distortions of the figure as in the functional unconnectedness of the various pieces: no part of the body relates mechanically with any other part. One glance shows the figure headless and the head in the groin is the new birth; a second glance shows the head bent in agony towards the groin, the new birth still invisible. Ishmael Wilfred won the Mobil Overall Award of Distinction for Painting and requires no praise from me except to note the freshness of his palette and the manner in which his movement into the supernatural links with some of the best of the original stone sculpture.

Heritage becomes positive then when we know that our present activity is creating something of value for future generations. It becomes more valuable when it does not try to avoid complexity and contradiction but rather confronts them, confident that out of their resolution will grow the new complexity of what is yet to come.

Notes

1. Much of this art has been destroyed but something of its quality can be judged from: Albie Sachs, *Images of a Revolution: Mural Art in Mozambique* (Harare: Zimbabwe Publishing House, 1983).
2. Frantz Fanon, *The Wretched of the Earth*, 1961; trans. Constance Parrington 1965 (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1985 edn), p135.
3. An excellent analysis of the market to which the stone sculpture has been directed is Carol Pearce, "The Myth of 'Shona Sculpture'", *Zambezia* (1993), xx, ii, pp85-107.



Andreas Green

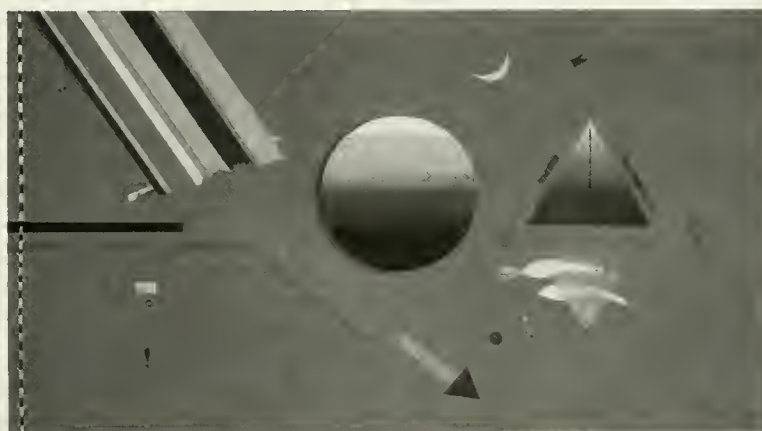
Painting the essence:

the harmony and equilibrium of Thakor Patel

Contemplation of the culture one is born into,
the culture one is educated into
and the cultures experienced in daily living
can culminate in synthesis and a deep fusion.
Barbara Murray looks at the work of a philosophical artist

The English word 'inspiration' comes from the Latin verb *inspirare*, to breathe in. It is an appropriate description of the process of the artist, Thakor Patel, who creates his paintings by assimilating, refining and defining his experience of his immediate surroundings. Patel's work is not a realistic portrayal but rather an interpretation through colour and symbol. He searches with a finely tuned awareness and then distills an experience, expressing only the essential elements.

**Thakor Patel,
Untitled (Cuxhaven),
1996, approx. 150 x 300cm,
mixed media**



A very direct example of this can be deciphered in a recent work, *Untitled (Cuxhaven)*, which was commissioned by a company that operates a fishing business in Cuxhaven, Germany. Patel focuses on the experience of being in that city. Two lines of subtly changing colour, imbued with motion by an arrowhead, enter the canvas, representing the two rivers that meet in Cuxhaven. Mountains that surround the area are depicted by a single triangle in shaded greys. Below it is another, inverted, triangle of clear green-blue water with fish and bird crossing, their curving shapes evoking their movement. Centrally placed is a large circle of sunset and above it a slither of moon. To the left boldly coloured strips represent the canvas awnings of the harbour area. Smaller objects include another fish drying, a flag, a planet, housing. All this in a surround of blues. These emblems of a place, of the experience of being in that place, are drawn and coloured with delicacy, precision, a surety and lightness of touch, leaving space for the viewer to wander and expand the concepts within his or her own mind. The positioning of the diverse elements, the use of colour, line and shape, all combine to keep the eye moving across the surface and in and out of visually created areas. The painting is a carefully structured balance of parts in a satisfying whole.

The artist explains:

"From nature you can see lots of different things. I feel, myself, I learned from nature, the colour sense, harmony, tones. Also textures, shapes, lines. Like in nature, all things work together to make a beautiful painting."

While recently staying with a family in Germany who are accomplished musicians with a particular love of the compositions of

Beethoven and Bach, Patel created paintings inspired by the music that filled that environment. Again only a precise selection of evocative elements and colours are used allowing the imagination to be drawn in. In *Untitled (Homage to Beethoven)* the clear fine lines of sheet music are employed as the basic structure with the bottom line of each set rendered in multiple shaded hues. Perfect black notes and other musical symbols seemingly scattered but in fact precisely placed across the page, lift away from the lines, giving the effect of musical sound and movement. The swelling curve of a piano is used, as well as arcs of pencil line and two ribbons of graded colour, to create a body for the lightness. A single larger circle of vibrant red represents that explosion of response one feels to strong musical climax. Patel says *"Music is colour."* He wonders however why musicians only use black and white to write music. *"Why not colour?"* The dominant colours in *Untitled (Homage to Beethoven)* are appropriately passionate and potent, red, green, purple and black, yet disciplined by the white space and by the exacting structure of the fine lines and musical notes.

Another musically based work, *Untitled (Homage to Bach)*, is centred on a page of music written by the composer which is collaged onto the canvas and combined with notes, musical notations, colours, simplified indications which lead, through the eyes, to the inner listening imagination. Here, in concord with Bach's music, the symbols are lighter and more playfully disposed; the colours are more measured, more delicate, with a vertical strip rising from a clear blue through pinks and oranges to a translucent lightness.

The German family's house was highly ordered, mainly white with some pale wood and black furniture, very little colour. Again

(left) Thakor Patel, *Untitled (Homage to Beethoven)*, 1996, 176 x 130cm, oil on canvas

(right) Thakor Patel, *Untitled (Homage to Bach)*, 1996, 140 x 88cm, oil on canvas

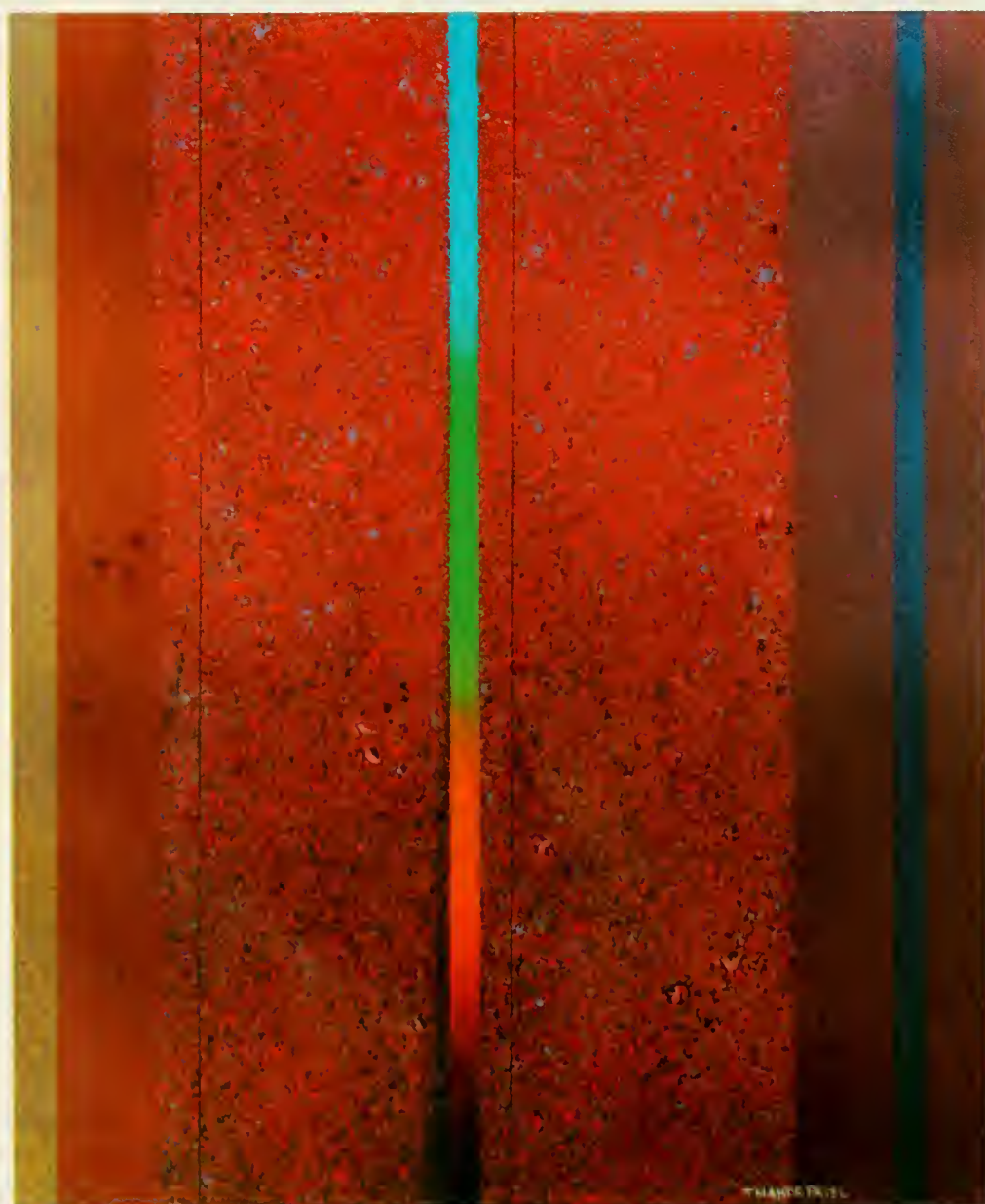
(below) Thakor Patel, *Untitled*, 1984, 70 x 57cm, watercolour



Andreas Green



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Andreas Green

affected by his environment, Patel began to work with large white canvases broken only by one or two strips of pale texture or shadow, some faint regular pencil lines. *"Why not paint colour or design on a door for example. Not too complicated but in a simple way, why not make lines, or scratch it out, or make a colour?"* Several large recent canvases are just such 'doors', a white expanse with some colour, lines or texture to light them up.

When Patel travels, experiences, elements, colours, textures, are absorbed and digested to be later composed into paintings. *"Everything is a symbol for something"*: a mountain, a road sign, reflections in water, a shell, the moon. Small details are reminiscent of objects seen, music heard, impressions gained, now aligned and contrasted, drawn together to recreate his experience. *"When I see some things I know that I can combine them to make a beautiful artwork. I take a blank canvas and I just experiment and it comes out. I don't really do sketches. Ideas, pictures, colours, feelings are stored in my head. I collect, combine and work it out."*

"I want to be myself. Whatever I feel, I must do it. It doesn't matter, Germany or Africa or wherever, or India or America, whatever I feel, wherever I live, I paint. Now I am in Africa for example, I must do Africa, in a different way, but it should be me, not other things. I fight with my creativity. Creativity is something, it is the opposite of death. My creativity is fighting with death. I make new life. I don't know how to explain that through words. You have to mark something when you are on the earth. Mark your existence. To create something different. I have a lot of capacity to create different things. If I take anything I can create. I am not physically strong. I cannot do anything that way. But through creativity I can do it. I can take anything, a piece of wood and do things with it that will make a beautiful work of art. You must have guts to do something with life."

"My favourite painter is Matisse. Fantastic. Brilliant. He knows exactly what to put in a painting. Making systems of compositions. Those cut-outs are wonderful, simplified. Simple is very important for me. When you know much more about some things, it depends upon the artist, but I like to make very simple statements instead of so many things to combine. I feel it is very hard to make a simple statement with a space, like for example, a Joan Miro. It's a huge canvas, just one dot and it is a painting and a lot of feeling in that."

Patel says that no-one can touch the old masters; that the intricate detail in Indian paintings is beautiful. The artists were given time and payment so they could just paint everything. Indian artists have their own system of perspective, form and space. Principles of both that Eastern perspective theory and modernist Western spatial method are used by Thakor Patel to create a unique sense of space and distance within his own canvases. His work *Untitled* (1984), plays with both the known flatness of the canvas and with three-dimensional illusion, with stillness and movement. The surface is made up of myriad spattered dots precisely controlled in size and tone to create vertical strips of colour which interact and relate. There is a sense that some strips are static, others only momentarily so, while the fine black lines and larger colour spots give the impression of moving or being about to move as you look at them. As the eye scans up the strips, some appear to shift from the front to the back of the surface. It is an experience captured in the midst of change from one state of existence to another — a momentary balance which depends on the precise manipulation of line, shape, size, distance and, above all, colour.

In her catalogue essay for Patel's solo exhibition at the National Gallery of Zimbabwe in 1989, Margaret Garlake wrote:

"His overriding preoccupation is with the play of colour: to push one against another that denies it, then to separate them with a third which negates the conflict; to clothe complementarities in identical forms and thus to question their relationship; to articulate the surface with irresolvable spatial dilemmas. And this is only a

contributory factor in the final purpose which is always to attain a sense of equilibrium that goes far beyond the extent of a single canvas to become a metaphor for human relationships; equilibrium threatened, on a knife edge, and finally attained."

In fact I think that the metaphor goes further than human relationships to encompass the concept of life as a whole. The Eastern philosophy, on which Thakor Patel's outlook is based, conceives of life as a continuing attempt to attain harmony through the reconciliation and balancing of the diverse elements of existence.

Talking about his work, Patel says:

"I like the philosophical way. For example, when I see in nature, some leaves fall down on the ground, I must think. When I see a flower, smell its scent, I feel we have to take its essence. Not exactly the whole flower. You can't explain what smell is. You know. But the essence I take from that. That's how I think of my work, as philosophical painting. Simplest statement. Now, because of African and Indian culture, my paintings are still simple but more busy."

"I find it hard to explain. Sometimes I cry inside. I know myself but I cannot say. I cannot talk even in my own language. My drawback is from the society where I grew up. I didn't get much chance to learn and because of society pressures, I couldn't get a chance to state any things openly. Keep quiet all the time. They used to threaten me. Because of fear. Still I have fear. If you ask me, speak openly about someone, I can't. Because they have pressured me so much in childhood. Only now I realise why I am like that. In Germany now they tell children they must say 'no' if that is what they feel. Don't say 'yes' anyway. And I agree with that, children should say 'no' first and 'why', arguing, and they learn. But I got never chance to say 'no'."

"I believe in the spirit, inside, the power. But not in church, like people who go and pray and tomorrow more corruption and then go back to church and pray. If you work hard, if you are honest, it will work, something. It's me now. It is my experience now. Because I work hard now some people will like my painting, not because of God. People have lost faith. They used to see what was going on. We are too materialist now — money, money, money. All is business. Too many businessmen. Sometimes there is a businessman with a good soul who can see."

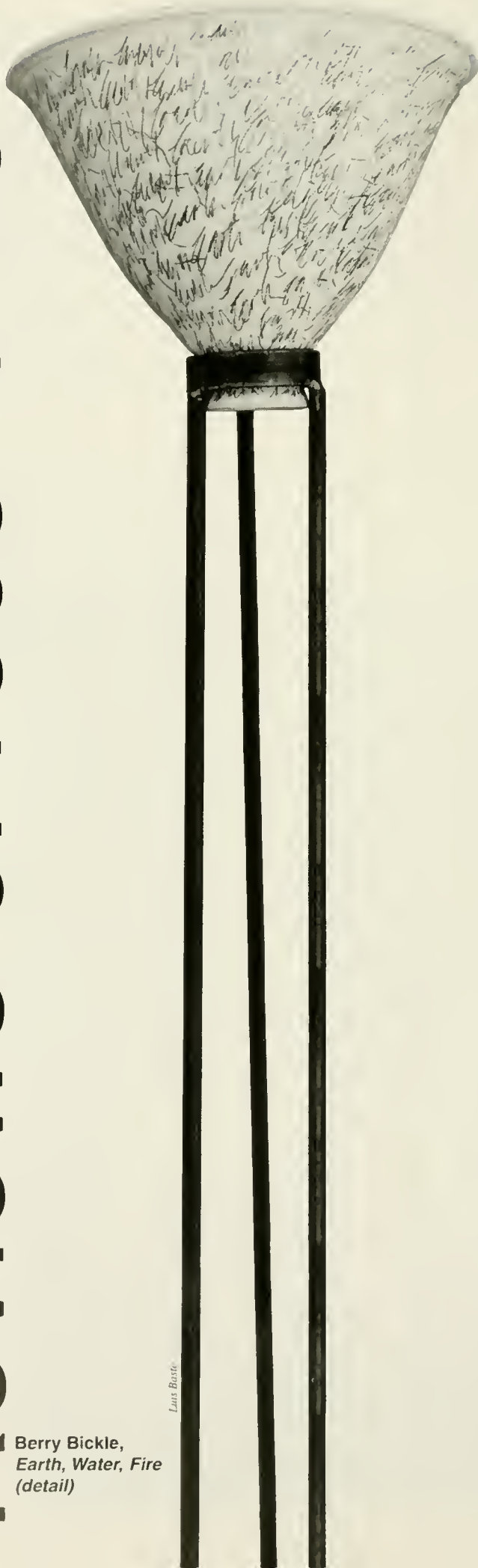
"I like to make a simple statement, maybe a line only on the canvas, nothing else. I want to go in the more simplest things now. For example, one line, it's a painting. How you utilise that line on the canvas. Bricks, for example, you can use in a simple, different way. You don't have to make it exactly the brick. Simplicity. Beautiful different grading with pencil. Only white, a line and a colour. It can be beautiful. I enjoy to make forms. I play. I like the work of Kandinsky, the different forms."

Life for Thakor Patel has not been easy — a difficult childhood in which self expression was not allowed, the loss of his leg in his youth, little education and few chances for employment: fabric design and printing, some teaching, a large family and the attendant financial worries. Yet his paintings express a great affirmation of life. The first works Patel exhibited in Harare were personal and agonised, black ink drawings involving interpretations of the body, allowing insight into the feelings of a crippled person. These were followed by larger clear-coloured and delicately shaded sprayed-on watercolours in which there was a sensitive delight in the environment. Then for a period, Eastern mysticism with its use of symbols and the spiritual philosophy of his Indian heritage became pervasive in his work. This symbolism has now expanded and become secular. Thakor Patel's paintings give us a window into a uniquely joyful world. They enable us to experience beauty by transforming the myriad confusion into distilled forms, concentrated colours and essential elements. They give us those moments of harmony and equilibrium that we seek for in the chaos of life.

Reviews of recent work

Berry Bickle,
Earth, Water, Fire
(detail)

Luis Bickel



Earth — Water — Fire, recent works by Berry Bickle, Gallery Delta, November/December 1996

This exhibition of new work by Berry Bickle offers a quiet, allusively rich and contemplative variety, layered with historical references, charged with the implications of repression and decay, and expressive of contemporary human existence in Africa. It reveals a fascination with nature, texture and graffiti, employed to create subtle poetry, drama and theoretical constructs. The work is enhanced by natural fibres, hand-made paper, dried red chillies and images that conjure up intrigue.

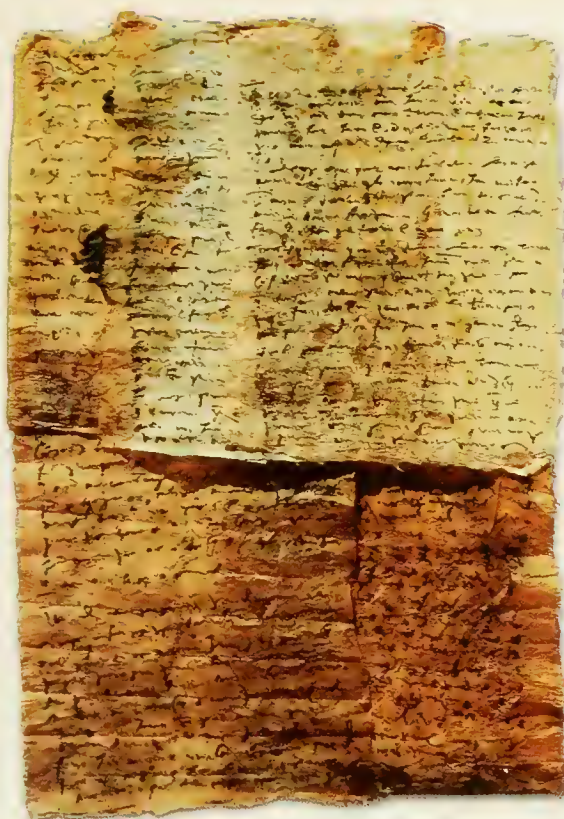
Berry Bickle allows no boundaries between art and its environment. She engages the environmental framework through both literal and conceptual strategies. The main space at Delta is set up as a *mise-en-scène* with a large installation, *Earth, Water, Fire*, encompassing three porcelain vessels, delicately glazed and inscribed with handwriting marks, positioned in their simple iron stands directly in front of a large script on Fabriano paper, stained, seemingly aged, and fraught with an illegible message.

Three of the works, *A Carta de Gaspar Veloso I, II, and III* use maps and writings to revive awareness of the history of colonialism, reminding the spectator of museum specimens.

The second long narrow room presents two different systems of communication, art and books, that meet in a confrontation if not an actual challenge. The four books in porcelain are slotted into iron plinths, countered on either side by a metallic-medium painting with incised, subdued and tonal graffiti. The viewer is caught in a revealing dialogue between the two elements in a dramatic but simultaneously intimate moment. Titled *Once Were Words*, this work makes one feel that these objects are more than material and volume, rather they form an integrating element, closed books, books without words.

Following this is an area where water predominates as the vibrant force. One can penetrate this space in order to identify with nature and the soothing prominent blue colour, and pause in front of an installation of *Sea Scapes*. Three plates hang on the wall, connected horizontally, and connected vertically to a blue-stained book, in a symbolic formation of the Southern Cross. Below stands a blue tub filled with water accompanied by an old, broken, blue chair with colonial inferences in its intricate wrought-iron elegance. Here the elements become intertwined making the spectator feel a need to re-acquire what is being lost, a need to return to nature.

The next room draws one in through its focal point — hanging from the ceiling, suspended and upside-down, a wounded bicycle. This construction reinvents one facet of the 'world' of this artist. From the initial stages of Berry Bickle's art career, the bicycle has been present in her work. In an early triptych, the Virgin was riding a bicycle surrounded by chickens. Later, there were linear mechanical drawing studies of bicycles. Today the bicycle has become a skeletal hanging form, wrapped up, bandaged, creating an atmosphere of ominous decay. It is accompanied on one side by a blackened metal bin containing the remnants of burnt debris, and on



the other, by a broken African terracotta pot filled with ashes. This installation is entitled *Law and Order*.

As a contrast, *Divine Fact*, a mixed media work on Cartolina paper, portrays the typical Renaissance Madonna and Child surrounded by numerous red chillies and swathed in translucent hand-made paper which lends a mystical air. Despite being confined within her own architectural space which enhances the ecclesiastical quality, she gives an enigmatic impression of vulnerability.

Smaller works are integrated according to their chosen themes; fragments of deserted buildings, relics, ancient scripts, becoming reflections that sustain a deep melancholy of time. They incorporate the ingenuity of vision with the despair of lived experience.

This exhibition underlines Berry Bickle's standing as one of Zimbabwe's most noteworthy artists. It demonstrates how perseverance, ambition and progression become a quest, and how expression penetrates, and explores, and is capable of its own reconfiguration. *Helen Lieros*



(above) Berry Bickle, *A Carta de Gaspar Veloso I*

(right) Berry Bickle, *Law and Order*

Reviews of recent work

10th Annual VAAB Exhibition, National Gallery in Bulawayo, December/January 1996

The Annual Visual Artists Association of Bulawayo (VAAB) Exhibition has painted a new picture about Bulawayo artists and the quality and diversity of their work since its inauguration 10 years ago. Initially representing a few artists, VAAB has become an identification tag for Bulawayo's artistic talent. This year's show told a story of endurance and determination by the over 100 artists who participated.

In a variety of media: cloth, wood, paper, batik, and even eggs, soil and metal, and covering a wide range of themes, the works on show were pregnant with meanings and feelings. The restriction of three entries per artist paid off in helping refine the selection. "What we enjoyed was that we zoomed in on the number of entries which was a change from the tradition when artists could bring in any number of entries. We had decided to allow for only three. Within that number the artists produced fantastic stuff so that the selectors had a difficult task," said one of the selectors, artist and Acting Director of the National Gallery in Bulawayo, Voti Thebe. "In future I foresee that we would need to narrow down the entries further to come up with the cream."

Originality, innovation and "something with a punch" which was sought by the selectors, was evident in most of the works displayed. Despite there being no awards, the annual exhibition is a boost for local talent, and household names like Mary Davies, Tomy Ndebele, Gail Altman, Lauryn Arnott, Telephone Bedza and Susan Elizabeth Coulson, some of whom are founder-members of VAAB, made a strong impression in the painting section. Even new members found a niche, like Sithabile Mlotshwa, an upcoming abstract artist with an affinity for culturally based themes. Her mixed-media piece, *Wamuhlu, Muntu*, captures the essence of African women.

Stephan Jost,
*The Ultimate Eggs-
H-aggeration* (detail)



There were some thought-provoking paintings such as *Thousands of Rwanda Refugees have Fled Kikumba Camp, 25km North of Goma* by Malaki Ndlovu in which he portrays the frustration and fatigue of refugees caught in political turmoil. Oil on canvas works by Mzilikazi-based Gutso Mutombo, originally from Zaire, though interpreted as naive by selectors, have substance. The theme of human strife was further carried in Stuart Phiri's mixed-media *Civil War*, while Anne Simone Hutton's *Family Ride* in aquacryl attests to her love of family life, laughter and togetherness.

Although there were poor entries in the sculpture category which Thebe said suffered the most rejections because of lack of originality, sculptors in wood, stone and metal could not be left out. Despite the overduplication of stone work, pieces in serpentine by Moffat Chitaunhike, Collin Chitaka and Precious Sikhulile Sibanda demonstrated notable creativity. Sheunesu Shumba's *Dancing Traditional Lovers* dazzled the eye, as did Phinos Tizvigoni's wood pieces, *Marriage's Main Problem* and *Three Suffering*. Rashid Jogee revealed his abstract expressionism in a sandstone piece, *Obelisk*, which bears some anatomical features. Danisile Ncube submitted two entries *Caring Mother* and *Bull Face* both of which reflected his dexterity with the angle grinder and the welding rod. And, strikingly different in the sculpture category was Stefan Jost's work entitled *The Ultimate Eggs-H-aggeration* which employs steel rods, ostrich eggs and a red earth background.

For the discerning designer, there was Tendai Ncube's *Guinea Fowl* two-piece outfit in batik, a medium which was widely used through the exhibition.

VAAB is currently the only existing visual artists' association in Zimbabwe after the Harare association went defunct many years ago. Chairman of VAAB, Rashid Jogee, says the major achievement of VAAB in the 10 years of its existence has been to bring artists together. It endeavours to encourage and promote art, and also to educate artists about practical issues such as copyright and marketing. In previous years, the VAAB annual has travelled to Botswana where it achieved good sales and according to Rashid, plans are to take it to Harare and throughout the country. The future for VAAB looks very bright. This 10th annual exhibition shows the importance that local artists attach to creativity. While writers speak through their words, artists paint, draw and sculpt. The work on this exhibition is the legacy of the artists of Bulawayo. It is the toast in the celebration of art in Bulawayo, which as a city is increasingly enhancing its reputation as a cultural centre.

Busani Bafana

Explorations — Transformations, Gallery Delta, November 1996

"We never knew such works existed," was the amazed comment of many visitors to the show of contemporary visual art exhibited at Gallery Delta in November. Helen Lieros had asked some of Zimbabwe's prominent artists to consider their past work, their beginnings and developments, and to produce a piece for this exhibition, *Explorations — Transformations*, subtitled: an insight into the artists and their work.

Arthur Azevedo, a school teacher and artist, Hilary Kashiri, George Churu, Crispin Matekenya and Greg Shaw were among the 20 artists who had their work on display. I searched around the garden endeavouring to have a chat with one or two of the artists and it was then that I bumped into the young painter, Hilary Kashiri. After exchanging the business of that day, he pointed out Crispin Matekenya in a nearby crowd. Matekenya was busy talking to an eager group of listeners, from tired cynical journalists to his former school-mates who wished him every success. Because of his good sense of humour, Matekenya is always at the centre of the crowd. I asked him to show me his work on the exhibition. We entered the first room and I immediately saw the *Baboon Chair* (see Contents page). My instinct told me it was Matekenya's work. I couldn't resist the temptation of laughing. I tried to suppress it but what I was gazing at made me want to burst into tears of laughter. My wish was to touch the wood and caress it. I felt my cynicism crumbling down to a deep felt sentiment, my senses of sight, touch, pathos, were affected. For me the piece is not only humorous but an apparent revelation of the artist's nostalgia for the Shona ethos, customs and virtues. It serves the tradition of Shona myths, the supernatural/natural creature, metamorphosis, in a visual interpretation of mythology: the baboon is a link between the spirit world and the living, as well as a symbol of wisdom and deep knowledge; the chair is a symbol of chieftanship.

I then came across a piece by Greg Shaw, a cool, slow-talking painter, a sculpture/ painting titled *A Private World*. And I stood there gloating over it, thinking about the



Arthur Azevedo, *The Last Bird*

'private world', a place of quiet, calm and tranquility. Who would not admire such a world?

Passing into the next room of the exhibition I saw that there were paintings all about, standing there, and there, rather as pieces stand on a chessboard when it is half-way through a game. They were lovely paintings. Some were human portraits like Pip Curling's five paintings *Jackson*, *Juliana*, *Joe*, *Mike* and *Idah*. This work is easier for indigenous laymen to identify with and understand.

The air in the gallery was a hubbub as stimulated people discussed the art around them. George Churu who had his work on display said: "*It is about time the formal art world in Zimbabwe recognised that there is far more art out there than is hanging on its cold stone walls. For that alone this exhibition is welcome.*"

The work on view was shattering in its impact; vital, robust, with an economy of line and curve, a loving coaxing of material to show its inner strength. At this point I realised there was no need to talk to the artists. What I had seen satisfied not only the eye but the whole being, the mind etc. What the gallery offered was an exciting reflection of Zimbabwean contemporary visual art. I savoured my last sip of lemonade drink and walked into the pleasant black night, my stressful day long forgotten.
Stanley Karombo

New galleries

Two more venues have been added to the map of Harare's art scene.

Doreen Sibanda's Gallery Mutupo, the more central of the two, was launched at the end of January. The inaugural exhibition, *Earth Elements for Art I*, featured the sculpture of Joseph Muzondo, amid paintings by Voti Thebe and Itayi Njagu, and Sibanda intends to supplement shows of contemporary art with the sale of artefacts and African clothing and textiles.

The variety and quality (Muzondo's *Man of Authority*, for instance, and Njagu's *Township Restaurant*) of the opening exhibition augur well for the future, but if Doreen Sibanda is clear about the institution's plans, she appears less clear about its name. The publicity material shifts from Mutupo Gallery, to Mutupo Totem Gallery, to Gallery Mutupo, and declares that "*we pride ourselves on the name of Totem*". One can sympathise with the dilemma, especially given the intention to depict "*an integral and cross-cultural heritage*", but it needs to be solved sooner rather than later.

Less ambiguous — and slightly less central — is the Outside Gallery, which opened in the garden of Pip Curling's Borrowdale home early in February. Like Sibanda, Curling has long experience as both artist and teacher, but she has chosen to focus her gaze rather more narrowly.

For some years now, Pip Curling has been devoting her attention to encouraging artists who inhabit the fringes of what we think of as 'fine art'. Her exhibition notes call it "*art without artifice*", and properly eschew the use of 'naive', 'primitive' and 'folk'. The result is a serious and unpatronising venue for the likes of Givas Mashiri's papier-mâché creations, Dexter Nyamainashe's wire toys, and the embroidery work of the women's group, *Kasona Kweimadzimai*.

Can Harare cope with yet more galleries? To paraphrase Bernard Shaw: You can have enough of boots, and enough of bread, but you can never have enough of culture.

Murray McCartney

Mutupo: The Totem Gallery
6 van Praagh Avenue
Milton Park
Harare
Tel: 705731

Outside Gallery
4 Kirkaldy Road
Pomona
Harare
Tel: 882443.

Donna Verbits



Robert Paul,
*Eighth Street/
Livingstone Avenue*

Robert Paul, Barbara Murray (Ed).
Harare: Colette Wiles, 1996.
ISBN 0-7974-1614-5

(Speech given at the book launch at
Gallery Delta, December 1996)

Since reading the book whose publication we have come to celebrate this evening I have kept on returning mentally to Matthew Arnold, the nineteenth-century English literary and cultural theorist. Arnold argued that great art was possible only when artists themselves were exposed to a ferment of ideas, to debates about multiple ways of conceiving and representing reality, in short to an atmosphere of critical activity.

So much has been made of Robert Paul's isolation as an artist in the philistine Rhodesia of the 1930s and 1940s that he is in danger of becoming a figure from a vulgarised European Romanticism. For the Romantics the artist was an isolated inspired genius, prophet and seer standing apart from humanity. Arnold regarded such an idea of the artist as preposterous. He argued for art as a social activity; the artist like any cultured person must know the best that has been said and thought at the present time for only then could art intelligently explore life.

As the biographical sections of this book show, Paul was frequently depressed and withdrawn but then painting or writing is a lonely business. The necessary solitariness of painting should not be confused with intellectual isolation. Something which emerges very strongly from Colette Wiles's biographical essay on her father — which forms the first substantial chapter of the book — is just how important to Robert Paul's development as artist were his furloughs in England. On his first return trip in 1934 he met John Piper with whom he was to remain in contact for much of his life. He also travelled to Paris to look at the work of Cézanne, Picasso and Braque and discovered Pierre Bonnard. In other words Paul was never completely cut off from developments in European art and in his later life, when he was at his most prolific, Patricia Broderick recalls how after the National Gallery library was established Paul spent hours there.

The point that I am making is that the Robert Paul who emerges from this book is a tough and intelligent professional: endlessly searching for technical solutions to problems which had arisen in his painting; Martin van der Spuy discusses his successful experiments with rubber and gum resist; Patricia Broderick suggests that the discipline of mapping during his early days in the police remained with him throughout his life. As an accomplished painter he used the viewfinder which he would have used on his mapping exercises "to help him to frame a view ... and [create] a successful and dynamic composition within a rectangle." Wiles, van der Spuy and Broderick all recall his working at particular paintings over a number of years but also that he was professional enough to leave a painting unfinished when the pictorial solutions evaded him.

As Zimbabweans we are of course most interested in the painter who more than any other artist shaped our visual understanding of our townscapes and landscapes and there is a great deal in this book to show how Paul identified essential features of both and proposed ways of representing them.

Central to Paul's later development was the burst of immigration after the Second World War which by the 1950s had created a far more cosmopolitan Salisbury than the small town Paul had come out to in 1927 as a young trooper in the British South Africa Police. One immigrant was the South African artist François Roux whom Paul met in 1952. Roux's chapter in this book, the reminiscence by one artist of another, is one of its several highlights. Roux it is who identifies the particular nature of Paul's achievement: the man who left England when he was twenty-one never presented this country as exotic or tropically glamorous. Instead he looked for and found in the elements of whatever landscape he was reproducing interdependences which he realised could be rendered through complex relationships of line, tone and colour within his paintings.

Roux is direct about the problems of the social artist which confronted Paul as a younger painter in this country. He remarks that Rhodesians expected that their artists should depict only "austere objects ... For a painting to be good, it had to be a super picture postcard, a memento ... The reigning motifs were 'balancing rocks', plain rocks were not good enough; msasa trees only when in colourful new leaf; 'The Falls' when full." (60) For Roux, Paul's problem was to steer a path between "the trite [artistic] conventions of colonial society and equally futile, unconsummated flirtings of the abstractionists." In fact Roux is wrong in that last remark: Paul certainly experimented with abstraction to see whether it might provide one of several solutions which he wanted.

The challenge Zimbabwe's landscape presented to Paul has recurred all over the world where people from Europe have tried to come to terms with what was for them a new world. Paul, according to Roux, found "*form, cohesion, variety, vitality*" in the apparent nothingness "*of nondescript grass and scrubby bushes.*"

Paul's technique in providing that cohesion and form is given an extended coverage in Martin van der Spuy's chapter. Van der Spuy begins his chapter with what is an important observation. "*While Paul learned from painters such as Cézanne, Piper, Hitchens or Van Gogh,*" van der Spuy writes, "*it is less a case of inspiration than of responding to certain challenges.*" Paul in other words was not interested in copying the techniques of European painters but rather in seeing whether in their work techniques were available which would allow him to rise to what his artistic intelligence was challenged by. His challenge was how to render in paint what he saw in Zimbabwe and among van der Spuy's several masterly analyses I draw your attention to his discussion of four paintings of jacarandas, that subject which has to be placed alongside balancing rocks and msasas as one of our iconic clichés. Paul's jacarandas, which are illustrated with excellent colour reproductions which characterise the plates throughout the entire book, refuse the fluffy clouds of mauve which so often seem to be competing with landscapes of European spring orchards. Only one of the four in fact shows the trees in full bloom and there the blossom is reduced to abstraction, patches of pale purple light against a black storm-filled sky. A second of the pictures is dominated by a

crossroad — the jacarandas are almost incidental. A third in van der Spuy's words "*is of jacarandas in winter when their leaves turn yellow and the sky is hazy with grass smoke.*"(69) Not only does Paul refuse the beguiling colours of the trees but he correctly places his jacarandas in the dry and hard context of that period before the rains.

However important Roux may have been to Paul, no individual can ever provide the exchange of ideas which I spoke about at the beginning. For Paul this came with the founding of the Rhodes National Gallery under Frank McEwen. Some of the more moving moments in Wiles's biographical essay are those where Paul, always diffident about his abilities, finds that his work was appreciated by people accustomed to judge artistic excellence in a much wider context than Rhodesia could possibly provide. McEwen exhibited one of Paul's paintings at the Imperial Institute in London where it was greatly admired. But Wiles suggests that Paul himself only recognised his power as a painter when Brian Bradshaw who was visiting director to the Gallery mounted a retrospective exhibition of Paul's work in 1976. Wiles recalls him saying after he had examined the two-hundred and fifty paintings with their enormous diversity of styles, media and subjects: "*I was amazed when I saw them there. They looked so nice.*" (54) If after his retrospective, Paul had any continued doubts about his abilities, and Patricia Broderick's essay shows that he often did, these should have been laid to rest by his being honoured in 1980 by an exhibition at the Pretoria Art Museum. Unfortunately he was already too sick to travel to Pretoria for the exhibition and died months later.

Several points must be made about the publication of this book. It is singularly appropriate that it should be launched here at Gallery Delta. Most obviously because it was here in his house for forty years that so much of Paul's work was produced. From all accounts the garden was a tangle and the house often chaotic but from tangle and chaos painting after painting emerged providing visual order and shape which allow us to see Zimbabwe anew. But this location for the book launch is also appropriate because it is here that Gallery Delta is now established. Delta over the years has provided a site where critical discrimination and selection are continually taking place in the act of mounting the exhibitions of the quality which we have come to expect. These exhibitions are an essential part of the ferment of ideas which I spoke about before. They are criticism in action. That implicit critical activity is also made explicit from here in *Gallery* magazine which Delta publishes. In *Gallery* at last is a Zimbabwean forum where art is debated, standards explored, theories explained and all are tested on paintings made accessible through an invariably high standard of reproduction. This book can now be added to that critical activity: it is an important step in moving us on that long road from the amateur and the provincial to the professional and the metropolitan. Artistic biography, technical and formal analyses allow much of the complex power of Paul's achievement to emerge. In Matthew Arnold's words, through this book, we begin to know Paul's paintings as belonging to the best that has been said and thought in our country. *Anthony Chennells*

forthcoming events and exhibitions

Crossroads at Gallery Delta in April will be looking at new work by **George Churu, Tendai Gumbo, Crispen Matekenya, Shepherd Mahufe** and others. This will be followed on 13 May by Tracks in Africa, an exhibition of paintings by **Helen Kedgley** and textiles by **Suzu Pennington**, which is centred on the experiences of these two New Zealand artists in Africa. **Richard Jack** takes centre stage in June with a solo show of recent graphics and sculptures.

Architectural Designs, for the Catholic University Competition, will be on show at the National Gallery in Harare in early April. Running concurrently will be a group exhibition entitled Double Vision-Culture-Time-Colour including work by **Bulewa Madekurozva** and **Chiko Chazunguza**. From the 16 April **Ishmael Wilfred** will hold a one man show and opening on 23

April is an exhibition of posters by **Chaz Maviyane-Davies** entitled Rights. Work by final year **BAT students** will be on show in May as will photographs of the San Bushmen by **Paul Weinberg**. June sees the opening of the annual Schools Exhibition.

A Woman's Place is the title of the next exhibit at Mutupo: The Totem Gallery including works by **Harry Mutasa, Chico Chazunguza, Joseph Muzondo** and **Tendai Gumbo**. In mid-April there will be a group show, Independence ... 17 views, and from mid-May **Itayi Njagu** will have a one man show.

From 27 March to mid-April, **Isabelle Sig**, a French painter who has been living in Mozambique for three years, and **Zephania Tshuma** will have work on display, entitled African Chronicles, at Pierre Gallery.

Following this in May, **Lucky Mutebi**, a young figurative painter from Kenya will be exhibiting.

Outside Gallery will be having an open day on 13 April including works by their resident artists as well as other offerings to raise funds for the Buddhist Centre.

In April, the National Gallery in Bulawayo will be showing photographs of Daily Life in Zimbabwe by renowned French photographer, **Philippe Gaubert**, as well as work by the **Bulawayo Polytech students** of Applied Art and Design. Zambian graphic artist, **Patrick Mweembe**, will exhibit prints during May and in June, **Beverley Gibbs** will have a solo show. Art From the Midlands, also in June, will feature work by **Tapfuma Gutsa, Costa Mkoki, Nicole Gutsa** and other artists from the Gweru region.



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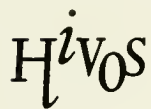
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The art magazine from Gallery Delta

No 12

Sponsoring art for Zimbabwe

Gallery Delta, the publisher and the editor gratefully acknowledge the following sponsors who have contributed to the production of this issue of *Gallery* magazine:



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Cover: Marlene Dumas, *Billy Holiday* (6 parts), 1994,
35 x 31cm each, ink on paper

Left: Suzy Pennington, *Crossroads*, 1997, acrylic, collage
and procion dye on flax

© Gallery Publications

Publisher: Derek Huggins. Editor: Barbara Murray. Design & Layout:
Myrtle Mallis. Origination: HPP Studios. Printing: A.W. Bardwell & Co.
Paper: Magno from Graphtec Ltd.

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Articles are invited for submission. Please address them to The Editor.

Subscriptions from Gallery Publications, c/o Gallery Delta, 110 Livingstone
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Depicting

Art can be a powerful catalyst for change and development within both the collective and the individual human psyche. Riason Naidoo, artist and education officer with the Durban Art Gallery, writes from South Africa

When the Images of Human Rights Portfolio opened at the Durban Art Gallery on International Human Rights Day, 10 December 1996, it was billed in a national newspaper as the most prestigious local arts gathering of the year. This was not surprising considering the line up of events for the opening which included dance, poetry reading and live music. The exhibition was opened by Albie Sachs, Justice of the Constitutional Court and long-time anti-apartheid campaigner, who gave a sincere and emotional speech that was greatly appreciated by the audience — an estimated 500 people turned up at the gallery that night. Simultaneous openings were going on at the Oliwenhuis Art Gallery in Bloemfontein, the King George VI Art Gallery in Port Elizabeth and the Tatham Art Gallery in Pietermaritzburg. It is also interesting to note, and appropriate enough, that the new South African Constitution had been signed by President Nelson Mandela only a few hours before the opening.

The portfolio contains twenty nine prints created by artists chosen by regional galleries. Twenty seven prints were commissioned i.e. one each for the twenty seven clauses of the Bill of Rights. Of the two other prints, one is the frontispiece and one the endpiece of the portfolio. A national relief print competition was organised for the frontispiece with the winning entry created by Norman Kaplan, who incidentally had also been chosen by the King George VI Gallery in Port Elizabeth to depict Clause Two of the Bill of Rights. One South African newspaper quoted Kaplan as saying that his idea was to try to show the coming together of all the race groups in the country, the forging of the rainbow nation, the forward movement and the march of the people in the new dispensation. Kaplan, who left the country after the 1976 uprising and established himself as a graphic designer and film maker in the UK, now works and lives in Port Elizabeth.

The twenty-ninth print, the endpiece, was done by Jan Jordaan, an established artist, lecturer and printmaker from the Technikon Natal Fine Arts Department. Jordaan's work is a fitting closure to the portfolio as he had handprinted all the works of art (some 1628 prints) free of charge and for this contribution he must be commended.

The participating artists reflect the range and depth of art in South Africa and while some artists have a strong academic background, others are self-taught; there is also adequate representation from both rural and urban areas. The images are impressive in their vitality and diversity of expression, as well as in the variety of techniques and creative approaches in interpreting the different clauses of the Bill of Rights. Participating artists include Azaria Mbatha, William Zulu, Andrew Verster, Thami Jali, Phillippa Hobbs, Vendant Nanackchand and Dominic Thorburn to name but a few.

Clause One of the Bill of Rights is "Equality". This is depicted by Margaret Gradwell who is a lecturer in the Fine Art Department at the University of Pretoria. The artist has titled her woodcut *A Fair Deal* and seems to focus mainly on the relationship between woman and man. The third paragraph of Clause One states that people may not be discriminated against on the grounds of race, gender, sex, pregnancy, marital status, ethnic or social origin, colour, sexual orientation, age, disability, religion, conscience, belief, culture, language or birth. Gradwell has represented these issues in small icons arranged in a circle that forms a frame around the central image of a woman and a man holding hands. There are seventeen aspects in all which seem also to refer to the signs of the zodiac. The circle can be interpreted as a unifying factor which is echoed by the spiral in the background that forms another visual link between the two figures. The central figures appear to be male and female archetypes rather than specific individual representations and can therefore be read as a comment on the universal relationship between the two. The figures seem to be united in a gesture of love that may not necessarily refer to marriage. The image has a sacred, ritualistic feel that is emphasised by the stylistic and iconic representation; the artist has further accentuated the sacred quality by making full use of the grainy quality that a woodcut can provide to give the work an ancient and aged look. Gradwell is clearly influenced by ancient art forms and the symbolism associated with them.

Human Rights



Ian Marley's depiction of Clause Five of the Bill of Rights, "Slavery, servitude and forced labour", is an interesting and unique interpretation. The image is entitled *Servitude is like the tide, it changes*. Marley says that slavery and servitude are ongoing problems that are always changing and that these evils have to be guarded against constantly. His interpretation does not succumb to the literal association one might readily conjure up but rather uses a poetic analogy: a businessman who seems to be drowning. Marley employs the image of a modern man in a suit and tie to demonstrate servitude to a capitalist society that is obsessed with money. The businessman is seen as a slave to the society and its pressures, with which he complies. The head of the figure, normally associated with individuality, is completely covered by a helmet with ox-like horns, emphasising blind conformity to the world in which he lives. The artist sees slavery, servitude and forced labour as problems that are part of our modern world and found at all levels of society. (Marley was born in 1965 in Gibraltar and came to South Africa as a child. He completed a National Higher Diploma in Fine Art at Vaal Triangle Technikon and is currently a lecturer at the Free State Technikon in Bloemfontein.)



(top) Ian Marley, *Servitude Is Like The Tide, It Changes* (Clause 5 of the Bill of Rights "Freedom from slavery, servitude and forced labour"), 1996, 51.6 x 35.5cm, woodcut

(below) Margaret Gradwell, *A Fair Deal* (Clause 1 of the Bill of Rights "Equality"), 1996, 34.5 x 30.4cm, woodcut

Jonathan Comerford, *Freedom of Association* (Clause 10 of the Bill of Rights), 1996, 39.5 x 29.5cm, linocut

Jonathan Comerford was chosen to depict Clause Ten which is "Freedom of association". Unlike the other two works discussed this is a linocut (of the twenty nine works, nineteen are linocuts the rest being woodcut or relief etching). Comerford's image is immaculate in its technique and presents a fine example to future artists who intend working in the medium. Not only is the image technically sound but the composition is also satisfyingly secure being based on the age old principles of balance and unity. The image is centred on two pairs of hands facing in opposite directions and visually united at the wrists by bangles (inspired by the artist's own adornment). The upper pair of hands is shown in a firm clasp where both hands are tense in comparison to the lower hands which are more relaxed and seem to be more in an embrace. This symbol of unity is surrounded by human figures that represent a diversity of people. The whole image is united as one sculptural piece and stands out boldly against the background, like a stamp on a blank piece of paper. (Comerford was born in Cape Town in 1961. He graduated from the Ruth Prowse School of Art and spent two years in print workshops in Scotland before returning to Cape Town to set up Hard Ground Printmakers. His work is represented in most major public collections around South Africa.)



The Images of Human Rights Portfolio is more than an exhibition of prints of "art for art's sake". It is part of a greater art project coordinated by Amnesty International-South Africa, the Durban Art Gallery and master printmaker Jan Jordaan along with volunteers from related organisations such as Artists for Human Rights. A portfolio of the twenty nine prints, in a limited edition of fifty, can be bought for R10 000. The money raised from the sale of portfolios (monitored in a trust fund and accessed solely through Amnesty International-South Africa) will be used to provide human rights education primarily for the youth of South Africa.

To show its commitment to human rights awareness the Durban Art Gallery extended the exhibition's run until 16 February. With the portfolio already being exhibited at the aforementioned galleries in December 1996, it was also shown at the South African National Gallery in Cape Town, the Pretoria Art Museum, and the University of Durban Westville Art Gallery on National Human Rights Day (South Africa), 21 March 1997. The portfolio will also be exhibited at the Rhodes University Annex Gallery as part of the Standard Bank National Arts Festival in Grahamstown in July and thereafter displayed at the Albany Museum, also in Grahamstown. Such wide showing of the portfolio clearly demonstrates the support of the visual arts community to the improvement of human rights in South Africa.

This exhibition of black and white images is indeed powerful and evocative. It reveals the potential and the power of art as a communicating tool in the world. The Images of Human Rights Portfolio is a testament to the goodwill of the human spirit. It augurs well for the arts in South Africa.

Note: The Human Rights Portfolio exhibition can be viewed on the internet on the Durban Art Gallery website at:

<http://durbanet.aztec.co.za/exhib/dag/hr>

People interested in buying a portfolio can contact the Durban Art Gallery: Tel (031) 300 6236 Fax (031) 300 6330

**Derek Huggins,
owner and director
of Gallery Delta,
looks at the developments
over time and the works of
a group of painters who
are finding their way
forward in Zimbabwe**

crossroads

Reviewing the exhibition Changing Directions in June 1996. Andrew Whaley used the phrase "At Crossroads". He interpreted this as meaning that the artists were themselves changing in their directions rather than that the roads they have chosen are changing the direction of art in Zimbabwe. When contemplating a title for a follow-up exhibition by the same group of artists this year, Crossroads seemed relevant and appropriate still, for a number of reasons ...

Africa is in change. Zimbabwe is in change. These artists are the product of change and their work reflects change and there is conflict between the old and the new and thus we are at crossroads. That there is always change is inevitable and undeniable, but the pace of change, with a new peace throughout the southern African region, has quickened.

Economic progress, modernisation and development accelerate and with such the elements of opportunity and chance increase and with them the probability for difference grows accordingly and some traditional and cultural conflicts are inevitable. We are victim or beneficiary of those changes. Old boundaries are pushed back with the effects of education, communications networks and information technology. There is settlement in virgin lands as the eradication of the tsetse fly becomes complete and suddenly there are too many elephant in the inhospitable Zambezi Valley which is now hospitable to settlers. There is a need to subscribe to a cash economy and to earn money to live rather than to be dependent on subsistence farming and barter. The penetration by the foreign media on all channels of communication is insistent and the influence of the world ever increases and along with it the influx of foreign visitors. Harare is a fast growing city with all the good that may bring, and all the evils also. The old Africa is vanishing as inroads are made into the terrain, as the land is fenced, as brick-built

structures replace pole and dagga huts in the veld, as settlements and growth points emerge, as the wild places become the weekend playgrounds of the rich from around the world. And along with it all the people absorb into their culture, while maintaining their tradition, that which they will and what is useful to them and what they must to survive. And if there be perception and sensibility and honesty the artist must reflect these changes. Those in the West who have an interest in contemporary art in Africa should be receptive to this change even if it infringes upon their vision of Africa ... the Old Africa ... the Dark Continent ...

and its art which is not lost but undergoing change as surely as art has always undergone change and which, if it is good and to be lasting, has always been regarded initially with suspicion and reserve and even rejection.

The artists of the Crossroads Exhibition are central to this present critical juncture. All of them, now aged between about 28 and 33 years, grew up and were schooled in part during colonialism, all knew conflict and war in their younger years and all experienced the excitement of Independence from colonial rule while at an impressionable age. All must have had the dreams and aspirations that went with that moment of Independence and all, no doubt, learned that the struggle for them was to continue. Further, all obtained a basic art foundation training against a high density urban background. Rudimentary though this education was, as compared to a four year university degree in other countries, it was an improvement over the past. The initial training of young artists is, however, just part of a process. Not all finish the course. Luis Meque, for example, after about a year at the BAT Workshop was expelled for a misdemeanour. They are students and they finish as students and their work is student quality, and the danger of them foundering, in the after-school vacuum without means of income or access to any form of state/public funding for art, is immense. As it happened, some students found their way into commercial art and advertising, into publishing houses as illustrators, some failed and a few managed to find their way as fine artists.

From the early days of Gallery Delta, one of our projects has been to hold annually, in the new year of every year, a Students' and Young Artists' Exhibition. This meant searching out and attracting the young, scrutinising their work, showing the best and most promising, and thereafter, singling out the most talented and challenging and involving them further. Initially, the young were mainly whites

who had committed themselves to art education in universities and polytechnics in South Africa or overseas, or those who, unable for lack of funds, were still involved locally. Given a decade however, towards the mid-eighties, these Students' and Young Artists' Exhibitions were dominated by young black African artists drawn from Helen Lieros at Ilisa College, from Tapfuma Gutsha's Utonga at Tafara, from Paul Wade at the BAT Workshop and from Mzilikazi Art and Craft Centre in Bulawayo which Stephen Williams was managing at that time. And it was from this matrix that some semblance and vision of the future of contemporary black African visual art — graphics and painting — in the country could begin to be discerned.

One of the early young painters we placed some faith in was Fungai Makamanzi but he opted for a commercially oriented career and was lost to us. Iki Muringai was another. Richard Witikani, Luis Meque, Keston Beaton, Crispin Matekenya, Ishmael Wilfred and George Churu were members of the BAT Workshop contingent in the late eighties who participated in these exhibitions. There seemed to be a good crop at that time. The works were mainly graphics but a painting by Richard Witikani is recalled, *Washing Line*, in predominantly orange and red, and a mental note was made that here was a painter to be. It was however, to Luis Meque, who was down and out having been expelled from the BAT Workshop, who came one day and while viewing his most recent work on the floor of the gallery courtyard at Robert Mugabe Road, that I was given to say, "You are a painter. I can help you if you are prepared to work. Go and draw anything and everything that interests you ... people in all attitudes of life and work and play ... standing, walking, sitting, lying, eating and drinking, at home, in the streets, on the buses, at work, in the markets. And come back in two months' time." Returning in due time he produced hundreds of sketches and drawings. It was the sign to begin to promote Luis Meque up the scale into group exhibitions of increasing standard and this we began in 1990.

It takes three to five and possibly seven years to grow out an artist after studies; time for them to find themselves, to find a visual language and a skill and proficiency to match and have them gain some recognition and acceptance. It is a slow and patient endeavour which entails frequent contact, scrutiny and selection of the best work, critical analysis, exhibition promotion and exposure and indeed financial support by way of loans or advances or other means of bridging finance during the frequent times when there are no sales to provide for the oft crisis. It is a labour and severely tries the resources of an unsubsidised private gallery. Luis Meque, perhaps because of his despair and frustration and being on the streets of Mufakose, accepted gladly the challenges



Luis Meque at Gallery Delta (photograph courtesy Galerie Munsterland)

which were offered and worked very hard. In his early paintings most of his subject matter was taken from Mufakose and the streets of Harare. In a sense he continued where Kingsley Sambo had terminated a decade before, using the same subject matter but in different way and invoking it with more mood, feeling, atmospherics and expression. He was to enjoy success, even with his early paintings when he was still trying to find himself and a way forward. Des Gibson collected a few of these from The Other Side at our old space where they were exhibited in the Summer Show of December 1990. The effect of this was, I think, cyclonic for Luis Meque and the other young artists of his ilk who were observing his progress intently. They suddenly realised and took faith that there was a chance for the painters no matter how difficult the way forward ... they did not have to become Shona Sculptors to survive. I think this was a major turning point, the beginning of a revolution for the black painters.

But these were still early times in the process ... everything had to grow up and out. From early 1992, in addition to the Students' and Young Artists' Exhibitions, we commenced a series of shows — one or two a year — entitled initially New Directions in Contemporary African Art in Zimbabwe 1 to about 5 into which we brought Luis Meque and a few of his select contemporaries. These led to Different Directions and then Changing Directions and, in turn, to Crossroads; promoting them as a group because of their common background and intent. And into these shows, growing out of the Students' Exhibitions, came Fasoni Sibanda and Hillary Kashiri out of the BAT Workshop during the early nineties, as well as the likes of Cosmos Shiridzinomwa and Tendai Gumbo who trained at the Harare Polytechnic also during the nineties.

Stemming from this series of exhibitions, we were able on merit and standard to elevate Luis Meque into our Prominent Artists' Exhibitions, another annual, and at the selection of Ingrid Raschke-Stuwe of the Galerie Munsterland at Emsdetten, Germany, into an international exhibition and subsequently, to offer him and Richard Witikani one-man exhibitions.

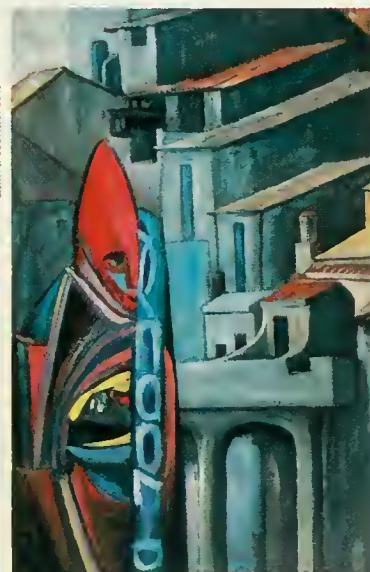
Crossroads, shown at Gallery Delta in April, is the latest in the series of exhibitions of the work of this group of painters — the product and culmination of almost a decade. What of it? Has it been worth the effort? Does it all stand the test? Is it valid? Is it new and different, involving and invoking change?

George Churu and Ishmael Wilfred take the prime space. Ishmael Wilfred, who was slow to evolve his own particular and distinctive visual language, shows three works whose titles — *The Desperate Cannibals*, *Monsters* and *Bearing the Offering* — speak for themselves. He is



Ishmael Wilfred, *Bearing the Offering*, 1997, 110 x 110cm, mixed media

(left) George Churu, *Waiting For Decision*, 1997, 102 x 81cm, mixed media
(right) George Churu, *The Landlord*, 1997, 101 x 65cm, mixed media



immersed, in his imaginings and feelings, in the nether world, the realm of the spiritualistic, of the dominions and principalities that are difficult, particularly as an African, to speak about and to depict because they are the reserve of the secret society, the witchdoctor, of superstition and rite, charm and curse and fetish, as old as the black peoples of Africa and invoking much of tradition and custom that has been concealed from Western eyes. But courageously, he gives image to them, in yellows and greens and reds, in a self-purging analysis of these real forms of his dreams and in an effort to rid himself of their mystery, their domination and fearful qualities and as explanation of the misfortune which has befallen him. *Bearing the Offering*, his largest painting so far, is a splendid work in its strength and rhythms and its bold colours, and is about sacrifice and his own personal crossroads.

By extreme contrast, George Churu's works, several in oil on canvas, seem to reflect a futuristic vision of an Africa beyond 2000, of dwellings with arches inhabited by people in rich and exotic clothing looking out on an African landscape — *Waiting for a Decision* — implies that bureaucracy never changes. His *Landlord*, an imposing, stern and totemic figure juxtaposed against modern housing, predominantly in blues, which climbs a hillside and is of an unusual architecture, seems to anticipate an overcrowded, polluted and grim future. He must be speaking out of real experience. His *Divorced Woman* is as a mask that has been exaggerated. It is distorted and cubistic. It seems to have come naturally and spontaneously and not as an afterthought or copy of Picasso who borrowed from the African mask. George has himself been divorced. Good with graphics, particularly woodcut, he accelerated his own change and new direction in about 1994 by the use of collage; taking scraps from coloured pages of magazines and arranging and sticking them into forms in his sketch book. Later he painted them out. The results had a surreal feeling with diagonal and sweeping angular lines and strokes full of tension. His search for subject matter takes him to the landscape also and he is capable of producing exceptional imaginative compositions of rocks and veld and hills which may include the hut and the odd figure. George Churu, small and slight of stature with perpetual charm and ready smile, is a progressive. He is the leader of his own church. He prospects for gold too, and has pegged a claim and is mining ore but still searching for a good seam with enough pennyweights to ensure viability. Art is a game of chance but so is gold mining, as he has discovered in this last season of phenomenal rains and flooded mine shafts. But he continues to laugh, and something of what he earns from his art is transformed into picks and shovels.

Shepherd Mahufe shows us life in the growth point at Juru on the road out of Harare towards Murewa where he is normally resident and which has become characteristic of his work. Shepherd, inexplicably rendered deaf and mute at the age of four, attended a special school in Gweru. He is able to sign, and read and write and to communicate amazingly well. His is a cheerful and popular personality within a strong and muscular frame — he plays rugby and has represented his country — and is the leader and hero of a deaf community based at Juru which, no doubt, he financially supports in part. He has never sought sympathy because of his disability ... it is never mentioned or acted upon ... he simply gets on and does. He will try and experiment with everything. He is good with graphics, particularly the woodcut, and has turned his hand to weld art and ceramics. An anecdote from his times at Helen Lieros' studio: he had fashioned some hollow busts with mask-like faces from clay and when dry had painted them with PVA as a substitute for glaze and then disappeared to the yard. Given some time there was an explosion. Shepherd appeared before his tutor looking disappointed. When asked what had happened he shrugged and made a face and gesture of bewildered hopelessness with his hands and, exhaling air, made a 'pauff' sound. He had put his treasures in a dustbin, loaded it with paper and set fire to all. He lost most of his work but some survived and the resultant fiery amalgamation and crusting effects of the paint were unique. He has now become known as a painter. In depicting the life and surrounds of a growth point he works through themes in series. We have seen people crossing the road, uniformed children on their way to school, water-carriers, abandoned and derelict vehicles — old Chevies, Morris Minors and Fords and Merces — and the landscape of the surrounding rural area with granite gomo and bush and brick-built dwelling.

In this exhibition he turns his attention to the nameless local butcher, a big and bearded man complete with traditional Western striped apron who stands to his electric-driven cutting machine over a side of beef. There is no doubt that the figure which dominates against the yellow background is a real person, a character from Juru who would be easily found and identifiable if sought out. The feeling exists that this butcher is as important to Shepherd Mahufe as was the postman to Van Gogh. He reinforces this interest in the butchery with a painting of the butcher's assistant who leans back lazily while weighing out steaks and further by a still life of a hanging side of beef which inevitably recalls Soutine. Would Mahufe know his work? "Probably," says Helen Lieros. "I often talk art history to my students. Soutine is one of my favourites. But Shepherd's question always



Shepherd Mahufe, *Butchery*, 1997, 117 x 83cm, mixed media



George Churu, *Divorced Woman*, 1997, approx. 55 x 45cm, mixed media



(above right) Shepherd Mahufe, *Beef*, 1997, 44 x 36cm, mixed media

(right) Shepherd Mahufe, *Butcher*, 1997, approx. 50 x 45cm, mixed media





Richard Witikani, *Suzen*, 1997, 89 x 70cm, oil on paper

Fasoni Sibanda, *Gambling*, 1997, 82 x 93cm, mixed media



was Why do we need to know about the work of dead artists? What about now?"

By contrast, the painter undertakes *The Wedding*, oil on canvas, as alternative subject matter and here we are confronted by the happy couple in Western apparel outside the reception hall. Between the bride and groom, in the background among the attending crowd, are two ominous and ghoul-like faces which rather dampen the spirit of the occasion and make us wonder whether the painter approves of matrimony. He is unmarried. But in an accompanying pair of smaller works on paper there is happiness as the couple dance their way up a hill ... and these have all the charm and feeling of post-impressionism from eastern Europe.

Now to turn to Richard Witikani who recently, in February this year, had an impressive solo show entitled *Country Life*. After leaving the BAT Workshop Richard had pursued his artistic quest while earning a living decorating ceramics. Drawing from life — the people around him, his family members and neighbours and fellow workers — he translated them into oil and canvas and oil on board in small format. He continued with his graphics also by means of mono-prints, depicting the people at nearby Ruwa, at the stores, waiting for the buses and other forms of human activity. Within the last year or two he has taken, with great success, to opening out on a wider and broader format his painting of the rural countryside and its people. In the odd past work — for example, *Reading the Newspaper*, there is a hint of Cézanne, and in others a flavour of the exotic fervour of Gauguin, and when asked if he knew the work of these painters confirmed that he was an admirer of Cézanne but knew nothing of Gauguin. Richard is tall and good looking, of sober and responsible habit and is married. We have come to know his wife, Amai Dudzai, and his children, his friends and fellow workers including *James The Potter*, through his paintings. He has the ability to imbue what might be regarded by many as ordinary people involved in mundane activities with a special sense of stature and capture them for posterity. Helen Lieros talks of his unerring sense of composition with enthusiasm. The best work of his on this exhibition, one of three, is *Suzen*. Of late, Richard Witikani has left his job at the pottery and seeks a small-holding in rural Goromonzi to grow crops and to work as a professional painter.

Two other artists within the grouping — Fasoni Sibanda and Hillary Kashiri — are the youngest, both aged about 28 years, and were at the BAT Workshop during the early nineties when Martin van der Spuy and Kate Raath were teaching there. Both were born and bred and educated within Greater Harare and they are city boys to all intents and purposes. Fasoni has been resident in Seke

and Chitungwiza — the huge sprawling high density areas some twenty kilometres south of the city centre — and from where he has taken subject and content for his work ... people carrying wood, the Seke market stalls, people walking through the house-lined streets in the dusk who often appear anonymous and lonely. He is gifted with an unusual and subtle colour sense — pale yellow and blue and pink hues within the background, and stronger and darker colours to effect shade in the foreground as he juxtaposes one against the other, working against the light. His method is quick, using broad strokes to structure his painting and to invigorate it with spontaneous markings. The best of his work on this exhibition is his painting *Gambling* which depicts a game of pool and it is good for its unusual perspective and structure in the background and the intensity of the concentration of the player in the foreground which travels through his arm to the extended and braced finger on which he is about to rest his cue. Memorable too, was his painting of *Zengenza 4 Market* which won him the overall award for the best painter in 1994 and which illustrates admirably his *contre jour* method of painting. Fasoni Sibanda is gifted also with his line — drawings in pen and ink — which is vigorous and full of tension. He shows in his nervous manner the sensitivity of the artist and feels the financial pressure of modern living in Harare acutely ... and his old yellow Volkswagen has had to go. He seeks to establish a screen-printing concern for T-shirts to supplement his income at which he would do well if he was able to obtain the capital.

Hillary Kashiri increasingly turns to the landscape — to broad areas of yellow savannah and the rocks and kopjes — for his inspiration. He moves away from the social commentary seen in for example *Going to Work*, a past painting. Hillary made a breakthrough in his awareness of space, structure and volume triggered by experience of land and sea when attending a Thupelo workshop in Cape Town in 1995. He works acrylics on canvas or thick paper and uses his brush in deft and nervous dabbing gestures alternated by sweeping strokes to effect semi-abstract paintings with good and harmonious use of striking colours but is adept too in using the figure, the form of which he begins to break up into abstraction as in *Reunion 1* and *Reunion 2* in a previous show. He is thoughtful in his attitude to his work and deliberate in his application of the paint, leaving less to chance and effect. He is tall and lean in physique with a bespectacled and studious look; he is well educated and possesses natural and genial charm. His painting *After Ruwa* on this exhibition is notable for the clarity of its colour and the use of space to effect the feeling of the expanse of the grasslands to which so many respond for its emptiness and vastness. His other paintings — *Epworth* and *Domboshawa* — reflect this mood also.



Laura Henderson



Laura Henderson

(top) Hillary Kashiri, *After Ruwa*, 1997, 56 x 76cm, acrylic
(above) Hillary Kashiri, *Epworth*, 1997, 20 x 24cm, acrylic



Luis Meque, *Friends Series*, 1997, 23 x 16cm, mixed media

The eldest and most senior member of the core group under discussion is Luis Meque, the painter whose origins are Tete and Beira in Mozambique and who was part of the diaspora caused by the civil war and who sought refuge in Zimbabwe during the mid-eighties. He was able to integrate into Zimbabwean society, obtain brief foundation art training at the BAT Workshop, suffer rejection and thereafter become the inspiration and pivotal figure and undisputed leader in a new era of contemporary black African painting in Zimbabwe.

What Meque did in the space of a few years was to create a visual language that summed up, through the people and their activities and attitudes, life in and about the city, better and more completely than any others before him. He said once, when talking to Adda Geiling: "I am black. I think black. And I paint black." Given to speaking little about his work and shunning interviews this was revealing. In his early work he would use the figure in the foreground against a row of shanty houses or a landscape but as time passed he simplified the form by enlarging the figures and allowing them to dominate the painting and then as time progressed to minimise them. He came to this by use of the larger format, the big brush and his inherent intent to apply the paint with quick, spontaneous gestures after looking long and hard, and through his desire to gradually move towards abstraction. There is hardly a city scene which has not met his scrutiny and he has taken us over the years from the Mufakose streets and their poverty to nights out with the boys in the restaurants and bars and clubs and flesh-pots of the inner city. His one-man exhibition *Life on the Line* in 1996 said much of this. Other painters seeking to emulate him and working from similar subject find it difficult to render the same content as effectively as Meque who is able to imbue his work with expression, mood and atmospheric. Somehow Meque has been there before them. But in this exhibition *Crossroads*, while preparing for a forthcoming solo show, he exhibits only a few small works under the title *Friends Series*, painted on magazine pages, which do not reflect him at his most impressive.

Also showing within this exhibition are paintings by Cosmos Shiridzinomwa, Tendai Gumbo and Justin Gope and sculptures by Crispin Matekenya, Semina Mpolu, Keston Beaton, Albert Wachi and Stanley Mapfumo.

And what do the observers and the critics say? Margaret Garlake, a London-based art critic in for a fleeting visit, said that it was a huge leap forward in a short period for contemporary painting in Zimbabwe and given twenty years these painters and paintings will be of tremendous importance.

Steve Fuller, an Englishman who worked in Zimbabwe for three or four years and

watched with interest the growth of these painters, continues to be excited. His pertinent observation: the paintings are more concerned with surface than with depth. His reaction: don't bother to compare this work with that of the West; far rather enjoy it and glory in what is happening. His point about the comparison to the West is refreshing for those of us — the whites — who, stemming from a Western tradition find it difficult not to compare because of our culture and the inevitable draw of the metropolis and the tendency to wish for its interest and seek its sanction — Africa '95 and all of that. We must take stock of where we are — we live and work in Africa and we must do what we have to do as best as we are able with that which we have around us and not look over our shoulder to the West. We are different from the West. We must be ourselves. Certainly, these young black painters are being themselves and revelling in their beings, in their Africanness, and in the discovery of subject and content in the life around them. Luis Meque: *"I am black. I think black. And I paint black."* He resists looking at a Western art book because he does not want to open himself to influence but he has travelled. And Shepherd Mahufe who questions why he needs know anything of dead Western painters. Frankly, they don't care. The identification and appreciation in their work of the truth of the life in contemporary Africa is being recognised and they are being enthusiastically collected by resident whites of all walks of life, as well as by expatriates and discerning visitors and collectors.

With the help of the art institutions — the National Gallery and its BAT Workshop, Ilisa College and the Harare Polytechnic which was to establish a fine art course under the leadership of Pip Curling during the early nineties — and Gallery Delta, sufficient support and encouragement has been found to enable a few young painters to practise a fine art career and to develop. Their work has been exhibited regularly in the Annual Exhibition of the National Gallery where Luis Meque, Fasoni Sibanda and Ishmael Wilfred have each won, and in almost successive years, the overall award for best painter. Theirs has been a concentrated, highly competitive learning and exhibition process, for some extending over a period of nearly ten years, and which makes them experienced painters. Their visual language is being and will be emulated by others. It is interesting to compare their careers at home in Zimbabwe over the past ten years with those seemingly more fortunate young artists, stemming from a similar background who were to study outside the country, in Canada and Bulgaria for example. In my opinion they more than hold their own and have, in fact, gained by remaining at home and now are the known and confirmed leaders in contemporary African painting in the country and the founder members of a

group. The first are always the most important ... and these are the first of a new expression which continues to develop.

It is for these young painters to accept greater responsibility in furthering the new way with courage and to maintain their honesty, sincerity and integrity, and undertake, in their work, other issues that need be looked at also. They are leaders. This is their challenge, theirs is the future of contemporary African visual art in Zimbabwe because they are African, because it is their time, because it is theirs to do, and because they have all the means to do it well, and in doing so, they must in their turn, make their contribution to others.

We have looked at seven core young black Zimbabwean painters. What do they add up to in artistic and cultural terms? At which Crossroads are we now?

Pip Curling, in a recent article, says of this Crossroads Exhibition that the young artists will *"surely be known in the future as the School of Harare"*. Is it a school? The painters themselves have not made any endeavour to define their thinking and work into statement or manifesto or to vocalise such. While there are some common denominators in the antecedents, region, background and studies, they are not working under the influence of a single master nor do they practise the same style. The grouping has been highly selective for purposes of encouraging standards and a form of expression and has evolved, post studies, through the life the artists experience and the exhibition process. Perhaps more time is needed to see if the artists themselves wish to coin a name and if the future does in fact determine them as a group or a school.

What I tend to see and feel, and it may be an interesting but difficult discourse, is that we are experiencing in Zimbabwe a black African post-impressionist and the beginnings of an expressionist period in painting. This comes about by means of a peaceful situation and economic growth, by formal tuition in the basics of good drawing and painting in the Western tradition, and by a new and more acute awareness among the young painters of the life around them and their situation within it and their need and readiness to record it. Their manner of expression is neither slick nor amateur, neither Western nor idyllic, nor is it geared to ready sales. Instead, their painting is bold and fearless in colour and content — not openly political but perhaps indirectly so as a commentary on poverty and the ills in our society. It looks closely at life around them and is spirited and expressive. This amounts to a turning away from the old to the new, from the traditional system of tribal etiquette with its referral to kraal head, to sub-chief, to chief and down again, and from the

anonymity of the craftsman who never signed his name to the growth of the individual.

And in their quest as painters to record the life around them, they are encountering and meeting the same and similar artistic problems and challenges that confronted the exponents of post-impressionism and expressionism in Europe and finding solutions in the same or similar manner. Should this be so, does it matter? We know that the post-impressionists borrowed from the Japanese and that Picasso and his contemporaries borrowed from Africa to effect cubism and that these are accepted without challenge. So what if black African artists find their way into what is for them and Africa a new way? They are engaged and may come out with some different solutions and some new ways.

They are black Africans and despite a hundred years of colonial influence they retain their Africanness and which, in any event, makes their work different — the subject and content may be universal but the view, the approach and the colour is a continent away. That there will be those who subscribe only to the old African art, to the view that Africa should continue to be 'authentic' and without influence, is certain, but they are out of their time ... and are guilty of the same accusations which were levelled at the colonialists, those of failing to educate and failing to recognise the right of self determination. There has inevitably been influence in the assessment of that which is seen to be good and exhibited, but as regards the actual choice of subject and content and expression the artists have found their own way in a contemporary modern-day situation. The whole process has been one of attempt and gradual growth and continuing experiment.

What is certain is that black African contemporary painting in Zimbabwe, after a slow and torturous start — the Cyrene Mission School of the forties and fifties, the Mzilikazi School and the Workshop School of the sixties — has come into its own. In this some of us can exhale a deep and thankful sigh of relief and take pleasure in the new and different.

The fact is that black African painting in Zimbabwe has never been stronger, never been better and is now established as a legitimate and worthy means of expression with a future life.

If there has been influence it comes from their training and experience in observing — they can look with the eye of an artist in the Western tradition, but they see with the eye of an African in Africa.



(above) David Koloane,
Untitled drawing, 1995,
70 x 100cm, pencil on
paper

(right) Marlene Dumas,
Magdalena XII, 1996,
125 x 71cm, ink on paper

(left) Bruce Onobrakpeya,
Orhare Orise (Spirit Well),
1985-88, 69 x 23cm,
plastograph

(next page) Deborah Bell,
A Rake's Progress (1 of a
series of 8), 1996, etching



"Young artists in a new nation, that is what we are! We must grow with the new Nigeria and work to satisfy her traditional love for art or perish with our colonial past ... This is our age of enquiries and reassessment of our cultural values. This is our renaissance era! ... Our society calls for a synthesis of old and new, of functional art and art for its own sake ..."

Uche Okeke (1960)

"Techniques are just one side of the matter. Prints have the capacity to reach many people. Therefore the ideas conveyed in them become very quickly dispersed. I have used the prints to draw attention to our myths, legends and history, and to present, in visual forms, our time-honoured philosophies and to comment on current problems."

Bruce Onobrakpeya (1985)

"This is not to deny change and development: that would be worse than silly; but rather to insist that past and present belong in the same story, that it is a story of loss and gain, of innovation within existing traditions of practice and of new ways of art making. Of course, the relationship between past and present will differ from place to place as a function of complex interworking elements. These will include the substance of the traditions of the past, their institutional bases, the nature and expectations of local patronage, the adaptability of an older tradition, the willingness of artists to experiment, and so on and so forth; and all this in the 19th and 20th centuries within further contexts of oppression and appropriation."

John Picton

"I hope that the idea of an 'authentic' African art unsullied by contact with other cultures can finally be laid to rest as African artists develop their own voice and their work becomes sufficiently well known to create its own context. Artists everywhere have always borrowed from anywhere they can find inspiration; the question is whether the art stands for itself not whether the imagery is related to forms that resemble those found in other cultures."

14 Robert Loder

Image & Form



Some quotes from

the catalogue to

Image and Form

selected by Gallery.

"A new breed of artists has been emerging from the community art centres. A distinguishing factor between them and the older generation is that they are bolder in their creative expression and better educated. Their expression is in most cases uncompromising and reflects their innermost feelings — it does not merely reflect the environment as their predecessors' work did."

David Koloane (1989)

"Many of the artists, including one of the first to qualify, John Muafangejo, have developed Mbatha's use of registers, and of lively ensembles of stylised figures. Typically they employ black figures on a white ground, with linear detail cut away to read as white lines. The prints have a 'readable' narrative quality, well suited to the biblical stories they so often represent. Similar elements in the prints of other artists may tell another tale, the story of suppression under apartheid. The black-and-white linocut has had an important didactic role in South Africa, not only in religious prints, but as a social vehicle in the years of the liberation struggle."

Elizabeth Rankin

"In a recently published account David Koloane writes about the tragedy of South African politics and the violence it had unleashed. The rabid dog as predator 'is in essence the personification of unleashed terror and destruction which plagues the communities'. Yet in discussions with me about the same subject matter at various times over the past couple of years, he has spoken of dogs in other ways also. The townships were indeed plagued with stray dogs; but sometimes you could tame one of them and it would become your pet. The image of the dog could be construed as an image of terror and violence; yet it could also remind you of some of the fonder memories of township life. Then again, dogs could roam at will. Unlike black South Africans, dogs had a freedom they did not have; and yet dogs might well get run over by passing motor vehicles. They too were subject to the same violence as people. Dogs, like people, could be the victims of brutality as well as its perpetrators. As an index of the complexity of interpretive issues involved in image making in that country, as indeed throughout the continent, it provides a fitting conclusion to this essay."

John Pictor

Margaret Garlake writes a brief review of Image and Form



Among the exhibits in Image and Form was Reinata Sadhimba's *Robert*, a substantial clay figurine. Precariously poised on oversize feet, he grins amiably beneath sunglasses and a battered straw hat. *Robert* is, of course, Robert Loder, from whose collection this exhibition was almost entirely drawn. The portrait is inexact, but it indicates Loder's receptivity and engagement. He is, perhaps, most familiar as the co-founder of the Triangle Workshops. These, as is well known, had progeny in workshops in various southern African countries, including Zimbabwe's Pachipamwe. Like Triangle, they have sought to stimulate new work through the confrontation of diverse artists and practices. Recently the Loder enterprise has expanded to form the Bag Factory in Johannesburg and Gasworks Studios in London. His private collection reflects his multifarious energies and interests. A few years ago his paintings filled the vast industrial space of the now defunct Atlantis Gallery in London. Image and Form took place in the Brunei Gallery at the School of Oriental and African Studies. In this more modest space it was confined to prints and sculpture.



(top) David Koloane, *Untitled drawing*, 1993, 70 x 100cm, pencil on paper

(above) Reinata Sadhimba, *Robert*, 1995, h. 68cm, baked clay

(right) Marlene Dumas, *Magdalena III*, 1996, 125 x 71cm, ink on paper



In this admirably selected exhibition confrontation revealed itself as a dialectic between modernity and tradition. In his introduction to the catalogue Loder properly dismisses any notion of an essentialist 'African' art as a repository of cultural authenticity; nevertheless he accords the 'traditional' a much greater import than it carries in western Europe today. The gulf between Marlene Dumas' ink-drawings (which look remarkably like monotypes) and Bruce Onobrakpeya's intricate prints with their lace-like textured surfaces illustrates the aesthetic poles of the exhibition. Dumas, born 20 years after Onobrakpeya, lives in northern Europe and is deeply immersed in feminist discourse. Onobrakpeya is a senior Nigerian artist, who has devoted himself to developing a synthesis between innovatory print techniques and traditional imagery.

No less evident was the dialectic between Segun Faleye's carvings (a drum, a painted Epa mask) and David Koloane's drawings which together emphasised the many senses of 'community', the one concerned with Nigerian rituals, the other with urban deprivation in South Africa. Or there were John Muafangejo's showy black and white linocuts, made at the Lutheran church's art centre at Rorke's Drift, to be set against Deborah Bell's *A Rake's Progress*. The subject matter of Muafangejo's prints ranges from industrial action by miners to the fabric and congregation of his church. They are unequivocally located in a specific place and culture, albeit one that may change rapidly and fundamentally. Bell, on the other hand, despite taking a subject identified with eighteenth-century London, turns her Rake into a woman and renders the theme placeless and universal.

(below) Segun Faleye, *Ogboni Drum*, 1991, 122 x 46cm, carved wood and skin

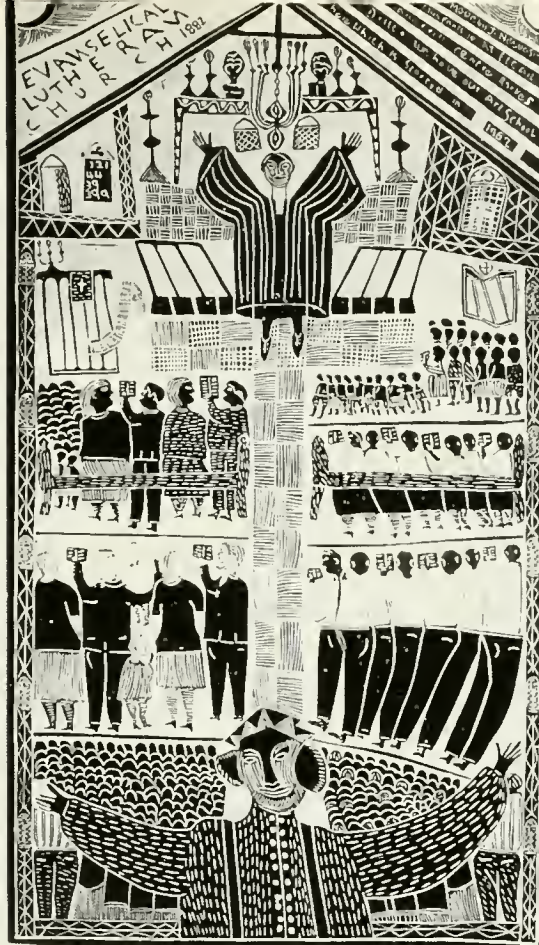
(right) John Muafangejo, *Our Church at Rorke's Drift*, 1968, 84 x 48cm, linocut

(below right) Deborah Bell, *A Rake's Progress* (1 of a series of 8), 1996, etching

photo credits: Peter White and Christopher Moore

Her tactic is, like Dumas' drawings, more post-modern than 'modern', a shift that can only exacerbate the problems, enumerated by John Picton in his catalogue essay, faced by the contemporary collector of African art. The very existence of African art has been questioned, particularly insofar as it embraces modernity, since Western preference has been for an indigenous art that is visibly 'primitive' (a Western invention with a thoroughly discreditable history).

The catalogue for *Image and Form** is a detailed and valuable production. By bringing together some previously published but inaccessible essays with others that were specially commissioned the editor has made available a considerable amount of information that underlines the diversity of current practice and working conditions in today's southern Africa. Diversity is exemplified by the distance between Dumas' renderings of women's bodies, always the same yet infinitely differentiated through the unpredictability of the ink medium, and the relentless materiality of clay, with which Noria Mabasa explores the inescapable predicament of twins. Then there are the groups into which artists gather for learning, stimulus and survival: not only workshops, but long-term support schemes such as



the Polly Street Art Centre in Johannesburg and the Kuru Art project in Botswana. There is a sense in both the publication and the exhibition, of reciprocity between centre and periphery, a condition in which the 'centre' is a fluid category which corresponds to the multifarious interests and activities of the collector and art entrepreneur.

*John Picton ed., *Image and Form*, School of Oriental and African Studies, University of London, 1997.

Image and Form will be shown at Edinburgh College of Art as part of the 'Scotland Africa' season, 10-30 August 1997.



Julia Malunga (Zambia),
Street Beggar,
1997, acrylic on canvas



Hilkka Ikonen

In early May, 27 artists from 12 countries as culturally diverse as China, Equatorial Guinea, Finland and Namibia spent two weeks immersed in art-making at the Mbile Workshop in Zambia. Part of the international workshop movement founded in the 70s by Robert Loder and Anthony Caro which has proved to be inspirational ground for so many southern African artists, this 4th Mbile Workshop successfully created an environment in which usually isolated artists lived, worked and experimented together.

Fourteen days and nights of intense activity, of sharing techniques, media, ideas, experiences, problems, jokes and music, produced an eclectic mix of work. Notes received from Hilkka Ikonen of the Finnish Embassy in Zambia (one of the main sponsors) indicate that one of the highlights of the workshop was a night performance piece by Finnish painter, Ahti Isomaki: A fire was lit on the beach where the artist sat contemplating his paintings. After some time he proceeded to burn his paintings along with his painter's jacket and cap. A woman symbolising Africa entered the scene, presented him with a drum and began to dance around the flaming canvases as he drummed. When the fire died down they left hand in hand. This description of Isomaki's performance generates thought, but, for me at least, the dominant response is: Haven't we been here before ... several times ... in several guises over the centuries ... none of which were particularly auspicious for Africa?

Isn't it about time that she/Africa stopped being so generously entertaining, seductive and submissive, took up the paints and brushes, faced the canvas and got on with some work?

Brief notes by Barbara Murray

Mbile International Artists' Workshop, Siavonga, Zambia, 1997

John Roberts



Some moments of Ahti Isomaki's performance, 1997

Kenneth Chulu (Zambia), 1997



John Roberts

A comment, which has relevance for artists in many countries besides Zambia, was made by a foreign artist at the workshop: "Great but it is obvious that the Zambian artists in particular lack the basic training in art, in drawing, which would compliment their obvious great talent in painting and sculpting. One must learn the basics first to bring out the talent there is, in full."

Facilities and opportunities for the development of art are severely limited in Zambia, moreso than in many other southern African countries, and the sponsors and organisers of Mbile are to be applauded for their support and energy. The Mbile Workshops are undoubtedly having a beneficial impact on the visual arts. Perhaps this coupling of Africa and Europe on a dark beach in Zambia will produce a new generation, for Africa.

(top) Milton Zihumwe,
Home Alone, 1997,
57 x 45cm,
oil on canvas



Barbara Murray

Christine Sylvester, visiting lecturer from the University of Australia and a specialist in gender studies, writes her impressions of the exhibition of work by various Zimbabwean artists

images of women in Zimbabwean society

A Woman's Place:

She is ... is it shy, curious but suspicious? Only part of her heavy featured face and stocky body is this woman willing to expose to our scrutiny. She is not inviting us closer or offering hospitality in her rural home. Wrapped in a modest flamboyance of colour, her mien is private and guarded. Her place is *Home Alone*. This small painting by Milton Zihumwe is, to my eye, one of the more compelling portraits of 'a woman' in the show at Mutupo. The place it depicts is ordinary and the figure called to our attention as a woman could be anyone; indeed it could be someone other than a woman. The moment of uncertainty in viewing 'her' turns us shy, curious, maybe suspicious.

The layout of the exhibition, A Woman's Place, at Mutupo: The Totem Gallery, encourages contradictions even when, as is often the case, the artwork does not. Casting a modest eye at all who enter the first room is Locardia Ndandarika's *Nhongora Mutsipa* (Shona for 'a most beautiful girl with a long neck and good behaviour'). Her superlative beauty lies, apparently, in her passivity, her malleability set in stone. Slim shouldered, prominent of pleasant face, she is framed by an ordered halo of hair, eyes cast somewhat downward, face expressionless but balanced. 'She' will cause no one who enters the gallery harm (or great excitement).

Behind her to the right, however, Nicole Gutsa confronts us with a large skeletal 'woman' as doll, of uncertain race, wearing a pirate's hat. She stares out in very bad behavior from her one functioning eye (the other is gouged out). She shows us her kwepi-doll-red oil

rouge, a perfect circle, and her red-coned breast. She looks, is made to look, silly and, simultaneously, crucified, her long arms stretched out, a leg kneeling, awkwardly, brokenly. *We Were Once Warriors* ... and then?

Flanking Mrs Good Behavior on the left is Tracy Zengeni's pair of mixed media Moslem women in *Conversation at a Street Corner*. Their bodies are in profile, stiffly so; their faces made to look like unset caramel fudge. Grotesquely muddy, those faces warn us off; they are not curious about us, confrontational, suspicious or shy. They are simply with themselves in a place of mutual words and bilateral intelligence.

There are found objects in the room too. Peter Kangware presents us with a medium-sized scrap metal 'woman' *Searching* and obviously, not finding. She is eccentric: chains of little pulleys are her hair, arms wiry, gaunt, a possibly tattered skirt (the usual costume of 'woman'). All this is constructed around an oversized purse slung around her neck to the front. It is full of 'things' through which the strained downcast head and eyes sort. We can only imagine the nature of the search, the reason(s) for it, and crane our necks to look in too. She is too busy to notice our complicity

The eye looks for a bit of relief and thinks it finds it in Colleen Madamombe's *Widow*, a charmingly lively though lonely older woman. 'She' is not large but has been given a powerful springstone bulk framing a fat serpentine face and neck. She leans

toward the viewer, not for support, not beseechingly, but not without some pain as well ... that right hip hurts.

Behind her hang two paintings of startling contrast. I pull a face at Harry Mutasa's *Women Gossiping*. No conversation à la Zengeni's Moslems, but gossip — the outsider's view of sociable 'women'. His accompanying painting is also predictably titled, *My Pregnant Wife I*. But is it meant to be the first study of his one wife in pregnancy or his first of several wives pregnant? We are curious, perhaps suspicious. Here a man's blocky head is fauvé in greens, reds, shades of brown and yellow. The mostly yellow 'wife' turns her head down like some African madonna. Her features blur into cheeks and her jaune hair marks the second halo of the show. She cradles her belly with over-large hands and oddly spliced fingers curl around a quilt of a dress. The scene is domestic, supportive, an unborn child already loved and given place. Mutasa's scrappy *Unwanted Pregnancy* then turns the theme around. This small 'woman' holds her head vice-like between her own solitary hands. Indifferent to her posture, she is locked in mental torment.

By another contrast, still in the first room of the exhibition, Bulelwa Madekuronzwa gives us *What Was Women's Work* — a glimpse of dignity, repose, untortured concentration. In profile, 'she' is making a piece of pottery, whether in a factory setting or as an individual artist is ambiguous. As many of the faces around, hers is turned down; but she is not unhappy or submissive. Her muscled worker hands and neck pull with energy. Her hair falls forgotten across her forehead. She too is yellow garbed, an unexpected off-set of frills against an absorbed manner. What 'was' in the title is now before us in oil, and both moments impress. This painting is already bought. No wonder.

There is more here but more again in the second room with titles like *Awakenings*, *Time to Move*, *Village Women* and *Chief's Beer*. The latter two are by Mr Searching, posters on canvas. Kangware's sense of these 'women' is rural, working, not evidently maternal. Women as sturdy, physically formidable people — no one's fools but few observers' idea of developmental progress either. The *Village Women* pound, overseen by a bare-chested man with little to do with his arms except hold them akimbo. Everyone is boldly outlined, vividly coloured.

I am not especially awakened by Chiko Chazunguza's screen printed *Awakenings*, but am drawn to another canvas by Bulelwa Madekuronzwa. *Time to Move* shows women and children in transit, possibly moving permanently through a blur and haze at a typical transport centre. Their bodies fluidly blend with the background, unoutlined, unfixed. They might be ruraly placed, but now, packed on their heads, children at their legs, they become less easy to freeze-frame, less susceptible to oversight, less secure too; they are nonetheless in a common enough place of impermanence.

Kwangare again, in metal. Again his second room 'women' move, *Fetching Water* and *Weeding*. Like his paintings, but more effective for standing free of a scene, these rural women are unflinchingly embodied, productive, not resigned so much as simply and totally occupied. Amidst their straining physiques stands Nicholas Mukomberanwa's stone carving of *Our Life in Her Body*. It is masterfully placed, allowed to be wistful in a room of labour. This 'she' is the contemplative moment behind the work-derived athleticism of her compatriots. Her long neck is unspoiled by toil, at least in her dreams, yet there is the hint of the ubiquitous swell at middle that affiances her to the pregnant ones of the first room and to the women and children moving lives through their bodies.

full curiosity and no shyness. Not too busy working to notice those around them, the sisters look ahead, eager for interaction. hilariously contrasted to this sculpture is Lazarus Takawira's *My Beautiful Wife*, a singular unbeauty who has her stone back to all entrants to the room and who, as well, scorns the sisters. This 'wife' with ambiguous sex is vain, fully self-centred and meanly judgemental. 'She' prefers the outside framed by the room's windows to the 'mere women' surrounding her ... or so she is chiselled and placed. Meanwhile, Semina Mpofo's scrap metal *Woman Pumping Water* works away, her manual labour sustaining the 'sisters' openness to the world and the vanity of the 'wife'. And yet her small frame is overpowered by the elaborate and heavy pump — the technologically cumbersome pump — she is using. It is her complication.

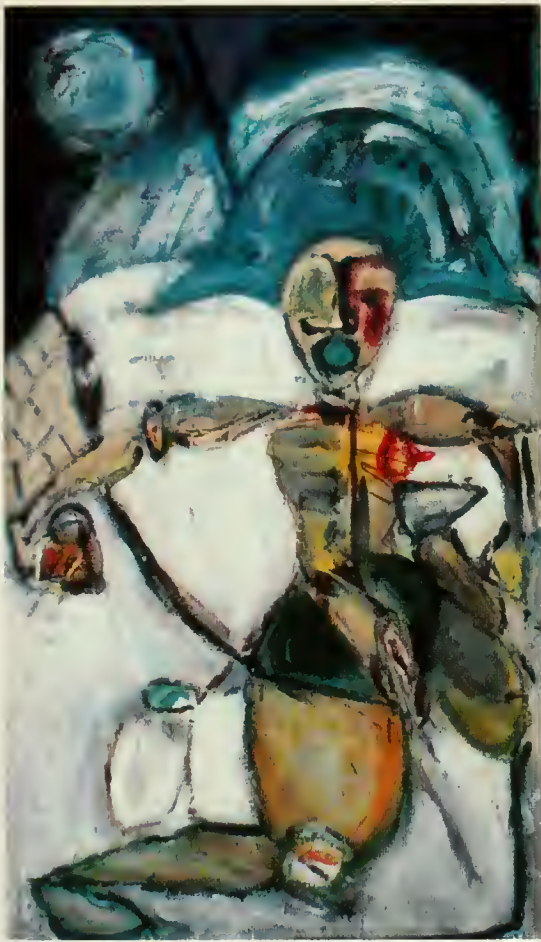
There are mothers here in this third room, *Heavenly Mothers* in screen print by Chiko Chazunguza. Their physical maternity is unmistakable: three sexed bodies, each with a black baby head at a large milk-bottle breast. The 'women' talk through the nursing, animated skeletons all, like a moment of lively death-life in a Mexican Day of the Dead celebration. Their indefatigability defies the death of maternal woman and also defies attempts to variegate women. These are cheerfully interchangeable mothers.

Overshadowing everyone in this room, including an acrobat in bright red costume and a woman painted with head cut off above the lips, glancing over her shoulder at us, caught in a room of men dolls devoid of expression on their faces (both by Ann Simone Hutton), is *Misery*. 'She' is Stephen Garan'anga's painting of a large woman-like human fatigue spot, head over arms over a red travel bag. Her feet bare, 'she' sits on a barrel rather than a proper chair. She is not going on holiday, nor is she of a mind to nurture.

Backing away from misery and out into the first room again, there is Ronnie Dongo's *African Princess* daring anyone to displease her. She is all springstone and serpentine resistance and grandness. She may be a princess, but she is off-puttingly vain, not well-behaved, not in any way shy or suspicious — or even curious. She works at something other than the chief's beer, other than *Picking Garbage* (Garan'anga) or the *Bathing Time* (Alex Lees) of mothers to children. She waits, but not in the resigned languidness of Fasoni Sibanda's *Long Waiting*. There is little searching in her eyes.

A Woman's Place is an oxymoron. There is no one woman or place where 'she' is imagined to dwell. At the same time, most places 'she' occupies in this exhibition are predictable, even in their contradictory evocations. So many places are not imagined for something called a 'she' — office buildings, political events, in the sex trade, in the classroom, on the television. So many shapes are foreclosed by the strong commitment to figuration, often to anatomical correctness, as marks and places of 'woman'. There are, in other words, self-imposed limitations on these artistic renderings, such that 'woman', although often well-presented, is also clichéd and unadventurous. We all know a woman when we see one. Do we? Is woman not an abstraction, a story, a fable, a little cloth? Is 'she' never a quick splotch of colour, a line, two lines? What one portrays as woman depends on where one looks and what one expects of a category of identity, what one insists on making concrete.

Doreen Sibanda is to be complimented for her daring show in a city that all too frequently showcases men and their images of 'placed' women. But one continues the search ... for those 'things' undepicted here, those allusions not chosen, as well as those that ring the bells of recognition; for all those things that may lie at the bottom of 'woman's' carry bag, out of vision, not easily figured, strange, elusive, curious and suspicious.



Barbara Murray



Barbara Murray



Barbara Murray

(top left) Nicole Gutsa, *We Were Once Warriors*, 1997, 208 x 119cm, oil on cloth

(above) Harry Mutasa, *My Pregnant Wife I*, 1997, oil on canvas

(left) Bulelwa Madekuronzwa, *Time to Move*, 1997, oil on canvas

Art historian and lecturer at the Harare Polytechnic, Frances Marks, takes a thoughtful look at the interpretation of landscape in the work of two New Zealand artists recently on show at Gallery Delta

Tracks in Africa — The Colour of Memory: works by Helen Kedgley and Suzy Pennington

Helen Kedgley, *The Colour of Memory*, 1997, acrylic and collage on canvas



Barbara Murray

Suzy Pennington, *Paths of the Ancestors — Limestone Land*, 1996, collage, stitched cotton and procion dye on canvas



Barbara Murray

Images which recreate views of personally or universally important landscapes need not always revolve around the conventional combination of horizon, fore and middle ground, all from a striking perspective. This is clearly shown in the May exhibition of recent work by Helen Kedgley and Suzy Pennington.

Instead, *Tracks in Africa — The Colour of Memory* (Gallery Delta, May 1997) details two highly individual responses to the land: the emotional effects of particular landscapes on man and woman, and the impact of time, myth and humankind upon the earth. Uniting both approaches is the attempt to reveal the spiritual life, past and present, buried beneath surfaces.

Neither artist is new to Zimbabwe nor to Gallery Delta. Helen Kedgley was resident here for three years and Suzy Pennington has travelled extensively through Zimbabwe. As the first part of the exhibition title suggests, an underlying theme of part of their work is to reveal the impact of their separate experiences and recollections of the Zimbabwean landscape and culture. Yet the images displayed are much more than visual correspondances to memories of a particular country. With the exception of Pennington's *African Journey Triptych*, all the works lay a second and more powerful emphasis on an awareness of the artists' immediate surroundings — New Zealand. As a whole this exhibition extends the themes of the strength of feminine emotion and the spiritual bond with the landscape which were first explored in a show entitled *Sacred Sites* which opened in New Zealand last year and has just finished a two-month run in New Delhi, India.

To consider all the works that Helen Kedgley selected for her half of this exhibition at Gallery Delta as examples of landscape painting may seem somewhat unusual, if not irrational. The connection between a brightly painted heart and the living forms of the natural world is not immediately apparent. Nor is it the case that images of domestic interiors be normally classified as landscape paintings. However Kedgley's sense of place — physically and emotionally — is so central to her compositions as to render other more 'appropriate' descriptive terms more than inadequate.

African Still Life, as the title suggests, appears to be an expressive juxtaposition of African objects and contrasting viewpoints from within Kedgley's own house, in a palette that recalls the warmth of an African afternoon sun. This is where the landscape element first comes into play. Colours and content are first and foremost about place. Their choice has been determined by Kedgley's desire to express that, though she has returned to

New Zealand, Zimbabwe still surrounds her mentally and emotionally.

This has not ruled out her awareness of her current surroundings. If anything, it has heightened her sensitivity to the significances of the New Zealand landscape. Parts of the composition have been covered with torn fragments of text, fused over and under the paint. These areas of collage signify and incorporate Kedgley's keen interest in the political issues that are of current concern to the New Zealand populace. Photocopied in reverse, these pieces of text are in fact excerpts from the Treaty of Waitangi, a document which is the key to New Zealand's social and cultural future. It deals with the Maori's ancient rights to the use and ownership of the islands of New Zealand, which Kedgley strongly supports.

One of three such examples shown in this exhibition, *Transcending the Shadows*, is literally taken from the land. Strips of local flax have been woven into coarse mats, exactly as the Maori have done for centuries. In substituting flax for canvas or paper, the relationship between the composition and its geographical origins becomes even stronger. The Maori people use flax to weave fine cloth for sacred ceremonial garments. Each fibre is respected and when the cloth is being woven certain rituals must be observed. These coarser mats for example can neither be walked over nor stood upon.

Inspired by Suzy Pennington who developed this format in response to an invitation to participate in an international textile exhibition (Flax 96, in Lithuania), Helen Kedgley superimposes her thoughts and feelings about herself, her African memories and her local position upon the woven surface.

The African element is most obviously reflected in the geometric bands which recall the patterns incised into pottery and metalwork or carved into wood. Within the sections formed by these bands are small individual hearts which glow out from the surrounding bluey tones. An obvious symbol of love and deeply-rooted emotions, the heart is and has been a dominant motif in Kedgley's work. Previously employed on a much larger scale, it has been used as a vehicle for expressing the strength and power of women as emotional beings. Even in this example, on such a reduced scale, these hearts are far from vulnerable. Instead they possess a quiet intensity, lending the composition the air of a religious icon.

The Colour of Memory, on the other hand, shouts and pulsates with life. These brilliant fiery colours and larger vigorous hearts which burst out of their sections quite clearly reflect Helen Kedgley's emotional approach

to painting, about which she says: "*I do not want to paint what the world looks like but what it feels like — especially the moments of intense emotion when the world inside takes precedence over the world outside.*"

Working from a clearly defined mental image rather than a worked-up preparatory study, her choices of colour are primarily instinctive and, I feel, make an abstract appeal to the senses, as much as to the emotions. Thus *The Colour of Memory* would appear as a painterly expression of the feelings of love, pleasure and intense happiness that Helen Kedgley experiences when thinking about the many landscapes, actual and recollected, that she occupies while painting.

In comparison to Helen Kedgley, whose painterly response to her environment is more or less private, expressive of how she feels about the landscape and its effects on her, Suzy Pennington's work has a more universal accent. That we are not seeing the work about us for the first time, that others have stood exactly where we stand today, facing similar critical choices, is a key element in Pennington's approach. She is concerned with the enduring qualities of the landscape and with charting the lives, ancient and contemporary, that reside within it.

Pennington's compositions also reflect her own personal experiences of her New Zealand surroundings and the impact she makes upon them. The visual rapport between her compositions and existing landscape forms is more immediate but the symbolism underpinning each piece is no less complex nor less individual than Helen Kedgley's. If anything, the personal content is more deeply concealed in Pennington's works.

Suzy Pennington does not describe herself as a painter. Her images are built from scribbled, dyed and painted canvas or woven flax. Subsequently embroidered, with individual threads, deliberately frayed scraps of fabric and photocopied cut-outs which are stitched onto the surface, her finished pieces have been aptly described as "*visual poems*" by the artist Patrick Heron.

And, standing in front of *Paths of the Ancestors — Limestone Land* is, to me, the visual land-based equivalent of holding a sea shell to your ear and listening to the 'sounds' of the ocean. A broad white streak runs across the top of the canvas and shoots down, like a fissure, to the base. Towards the bottom of this downward pointing sliver are other smaller streaks. Visualised by the artist as a cross-sectional view of a landscape over time, these smaller marks buried with land recall natural rock formations. At the same time they may also

perhaps symbolise the remains of man on the same but then far younger landscape.

Although the locus of Suzy Pennington's work is New Zealand, the cultures she reflects within her compositions are often more distant. *Dreaming from Afar* evokes memories of tranquil seas and deserted beaches. The aquamarine tone does reflect the proximity of the Pacific Ocean to the artist but the 'view' is as historical as it is contemporary. The closely aligned stitches, so suggestive of ripples in the sand, are in fact a personal vocabulary derived from classical scripts. Herein, Pennington's typographical interest in ancient languages such as Sanskrit, has been translated into three dimensions — a means of formally acknowledging the ancient soul of the landscape and meanings invested in it by us. In other works exhibited here, the incorporation of written and oral histories is less heavily disguised. *Paths to the Sacred Mountain* and *Guide for the Journey* include fragments of photocopied text and numerals which have been fixed down and overpainted.

The idea that there are more human forces that dwell within the landscape with the power to secure our fate is another feature that these pieces develop. At the centre of both *Protected Land* and *Crossroads* is an image of a classical goddess. She reappears about the 'mountain peak' in *Paths to the Sacred Mountain*. All three are personifications of multi-cultural beliefs about the inner lives of the earth and the energies present at sacred sites and along sacred routes. This is extended in *Guide for the Journey* where the 'path' towards the mount and the mount itself, is overlain with a cross. These crosses are symbols, both of the pagan beliefs about the keepers of crossroads and of the choices and decisions we have to make in moving our lives forwards.

That these last four images are worked on mats of woven flax, itself a sacred material, consolidates the mystical and metaphysical meanings that currently surround Pennington's approach to her work.

Helen Kedgley and Suzy Pennington share a cultural heritage, a studio and, as seen at Gallery Delta, particular formal elements such as texts, crosses, hearts, but theirs is not a collaborative effort. What fundamentally unites these two women, as individuals and as artists, is their concern with the interaction of people and the land. In *Tracks in Africa — the Colour of Memory* each artist describes the emotional life of the landscape; it is an exhibition that is as much about personal expression as it is about hidden content and private meaning.

(below) Helen Kedgley, *Transcending the Shadows*, 1997, acrylic and collage on flax
 (bottom) Helen Kedgley, *African Still Life*, 1997, acrylic and collage on paper



Barbara Murray



Barbara Murray



Barbara Murray



Barbara Murray



Barbara Murray

(top right) Suzy Pennington, *Guide for the Journey*, 1997, acrylic, collage and procion dye on flax
 (middle right) Suzy Pennington, *Paths to the Sacred Mountain*, 1997, acrylic, collage and procion dye on flax
 (bottom right) Suzy Pennington, *Dreaming from Afar*, 1997, collage, stitched fabric, procion dye on canvas

Still Searching : works by Sithabile Mlotshwa

To be heard through one's art, one has to shout, especially as a young, female artist. This is how Sithabile Mlotshwa talks about her short yet bright career as an artist. This first solo exhibition at the National Gallery in Bulawayo displays 30 works by one of the region's newly found art gems. To the discerning eye, Mlotshwa still has more work to do before the art world says 'Yes' — like a child reaching adolescence, she has still to establish her identity.

"I decided on the title 'Still Searching' because that is what I am literally doing. I am yet to develop the right style that can be identified with me," says Mlotshwa. "I am still trying to find a name and this title blends with my experiences which I have tried to bring out in the different paintings."

Mlotshwa (22), a Mzilikazi Art Centre graduate, explores African community life in her work, with emphasis on the female figure. Her paintings blend in a rhythm of movement the dancing joyful women, the long faces of villagers, the social setting, gossiping market traders and beer drinkers. A major break came last October when Mlotshwa was one of three guest artists invited to attend a month-long cultural exchange programme in Sweden. The theme of the programme was 'Building Bridges' specifically between Beira, Bulawayo and Gothenburg, all second cities in their respective countries. During the programme, Mlotshwa participated in two exhibitions as well as hosting a workshop on painting, textiles and batik printing. In a quest for originality, Mlotshwa's paintings are

done using her fingers. *"I think it is better to mix colours with my fingers. I enjoy playing around with the paint. I experiment with it and try to find a better method I can use for painting."*

Central to her expression is the form of a 'typical African' woman with well defined hips. *"Some people call me a sexist but I am very much touched by what women go through, what it means to be a woman. I realise women work so hard and yet get so little in return."* Reflecting on her work, Mlotshwa admits strong attachment to individual pieces especially *Wamuhle Umuntu*, a depiction of an ethnically dressed woman with a full 'African' figure. In the background is another 'typical African' woman with distinctive earrings. Other cultural artefacts such as clay pots — a strong community symbol — waist beads and leg beads are also incorporated. *"Originally this was a flat painting of squares and cubes ... It was different from the rest because I did it in Sweden with the aim of portraying what Africa was to me. I guess I was really homesick."*

Mlotshwa has learned from experience that achievement costs many ruined paintings and moments of outright despair. She has experimented with collage, batik, tissue paper, fabric dyes and many other media resulting in a wide range of work. But being the eighth child in a family of nine, Sithabile Mlotshwa believes in perseverance and accepting mistakes, and, with maturity, her nascent ability and focus may develop.

forthcoming events and exhibitions

Luis Meque will have a solo exhibition in early July at Gallery Delta. The leading place of this young artist is now firmly established in the contemporary art scene of Zimbabwe and this will be an opportunity to view a large selection of his latest work. Following this will be a show of works by Zimbabwe's Prominent Artists including amongst others **Berry Bickle, Tapfuma Gutsa, Babette Fitzgerald, Rashid Jogee, Helen Lieros, Simon Back, Gerry Dixon** and **Ishmael Wilfred**.

For one week only, in August, Gallery Delta will host an extraordinary live performance — a sound /art installation of **Tonga Music**. Tonga musicians and Austrian composers who have been working with Keith Goddard of the Kunzwana Trust will present an evening of "new music" within an installation created by two Austrian artists. The patterns and rhythms of Tonga music, which is created with antelope horns, drums, singing and hand rattles, have been incorporated with contemporary music. *"The strangely contemporary feel of Tonga music has aroused the curiosity of creative artists in Europe and America and has led to the design of a computer-generated sound*

installation which explores the sound worlds of ancient Tonga musical expression and the digital world of electro-acoustic music. The aim of the composition is to increase awareness of Tonga music and culture and to demonstrate the distinct creativity inherent in Tonga music."

This musical experience is accompanying an extensive exhibition of **Batonga Art and Artefacts** entitled Across the Waters curated by Grazyna Zaucha of the Choma Museum in Zambia which will be on display at the National Gallery in Bulawayo in July and in the Harare Gardens in August concurrent with the ZIBF. Both the exhibition and the music will be travelling throughout southern Africa, including places in the Zambezi Valley, and on to the Netherlands and Austria.

The National Gallery in Bulawayo will host an exhibition of **Rock Art** from Zambia and a solo show of work by **Danisile Ncube** in August and, in September, the Scandia **Wire Art Exhibition**. On 26 September the NGB will be hosting an evening of music and art for which Derek Hudson, the Bulawayo musician and conductor, has

composed a piece. This has been distributed to artists to use as direct inspiration for a painting or sculpture to be exhibited as the music is played during the evening at NGB.

Mutupo: The Totem Gallery will hold an exhibition of paintings by young and talented women artists **Bulelwa Madekuronzwa** and **Tendai Gumbo** during July; August will see a group exhibition around the theme "Heroes" including work by **Harry Mutasa, Joseph Muzondo** and **Nicholas Mukomberanwa**; and in September there will be a solo show by **Chiko Chazunguza**.

The National Gallery in Harare will be closed for judging of the Heritage during July and opens on 6 August with the Longmans' Women Visual Artists' Exhibition; 19 August sees a show of work by **Charles Kamangwana**. In September the gallery will host a group show by **NGZ staff**, an exhibition of sculpture by a French artist, **Bernard Pages**, wall-hangings by **Johannesburg Street Kids** and, yet to be confirmed, a retrospective of work by **Tapfuma Gutsa**.



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